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EVERYONE!**

DRAYMOND GREEN, STEPH CURRY, KLAY THOMPSON



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NBA HISTORY
ROLLS ON AND ON**

By
**RICK
REILLY**
P. 30

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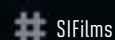
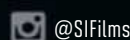
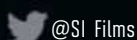
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LINEUP

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The Warriors

The NBA's best team doesn't merely dominate. It also delights, enthralls and inspires

By Rick Reilly

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Valparaiso

The tiny Indiana school is poised to become the next mid-major party crasher

By Adam Doster

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3.7.16

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Photograph by
Noah Graham NBAE/Getty Images
On the cover:
Walter Iooss Jr. for Sports Illustrated

ONE SMALL STEPH FOR MAN

When Curry warms up at Oracle, his shooting range extends to the hallway beyond the baseline.



Sports Illustrated



"The way I see it, I plan on catching my entire career until I'm told otherwise."

—Buster Posey

the opportunity that we have, not only with the [pitching] staff but also with our position players. It's a unique opportunity, and we have to try to make the most of it.

RA: *Many baseball experts have said that you should maybe switch to first base and save your knees. Do you ever see a move to first base happening?*

BP: I plan on catching for as long as I can. I think since I didn't start catching until my sophomore year [at Florida State], I have less wear and tear on my body than someone who might have caught in high school, or as early as little league, and then all through college. The way I see it, I plan on catching my entire career until I'm told otherwise. □

*For more of Posey's interview, plus the SI Now archive, go to **SI.com/sinow***

BUSTER POSEY The Giants' 28-year-old catcher and 2012 NL MVP sat down with host Ryan Asselta to discuss the team's off-season upgrades and whether he'll ever make a move to first base.

RYAN ASSELTA: *On paper last year you guys had one of the best rotations going into the season. However, injuries became a big issue. How big was this off-season for you, revamping the pitching rotation with big free-agent signings Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija?*

BUSTER POSEY: When you add guys like Cueto and Samardzija, you gotta feel good about

that. I've faced those guys a decent amount of times over the past six years, and I'll be glad having to catch them now instead of hitting off of them. **RA:** *[Even with those additions] do you feel the Giants are flying under the radar heading into the season?*

BP: I know in the clubhouse we feel like we've got a lot of talent. I think we understand

TUNE IN



▶ **EPISODE: FEB. 22**

SI senior writer Greg Bishop explains why the Pats' Rob Gronkowski's wild behavior gets a pass



▶ **EPISODE: FEB. 23**

Pelicans F Anthony Davis reflects on his career-high, 59-point, 20-rebound game against the Pistons



▶ **EPISODE: FEB. 24**

SI deputy managing editor Jon Wertheim talks about why he's not 100% convinced Ronda Rousey will fight again



▶ **EPISODE: FEB. 25**

SI High School Athlete of the Month Sophia Foresta discusses how she became a BMX racer

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1
of
3**Leading
Off**

The Race Begins

■ It's the beautiful thing about spring training: When it comes to berths in the World Series, all 30 teams are on the outside looking in. Across Florida and Arizona camps swung into high gear last week—or as high a gear as can be reached in the earliest full-squad workouts. The baseball season is a marathon, not a sprint, more than one manager likely said in a camp-opening speech—though the leisurely jog the White Sox took in Phoenix suggested a third, less rigorous option.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MORRY GASH
AP



+

2
3
**Leading
Off**

Places in The Sun

1. The Cardinals loosened up in Jupiter, Fla.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JEFF ROBERSON
AP

2. Angels catcher Geovany Soto went barehanded in Tempe, Ariz.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MATT YORK
AP

3. Rays pitchers hit the comebacker trail in Port Charlotte, Fla.

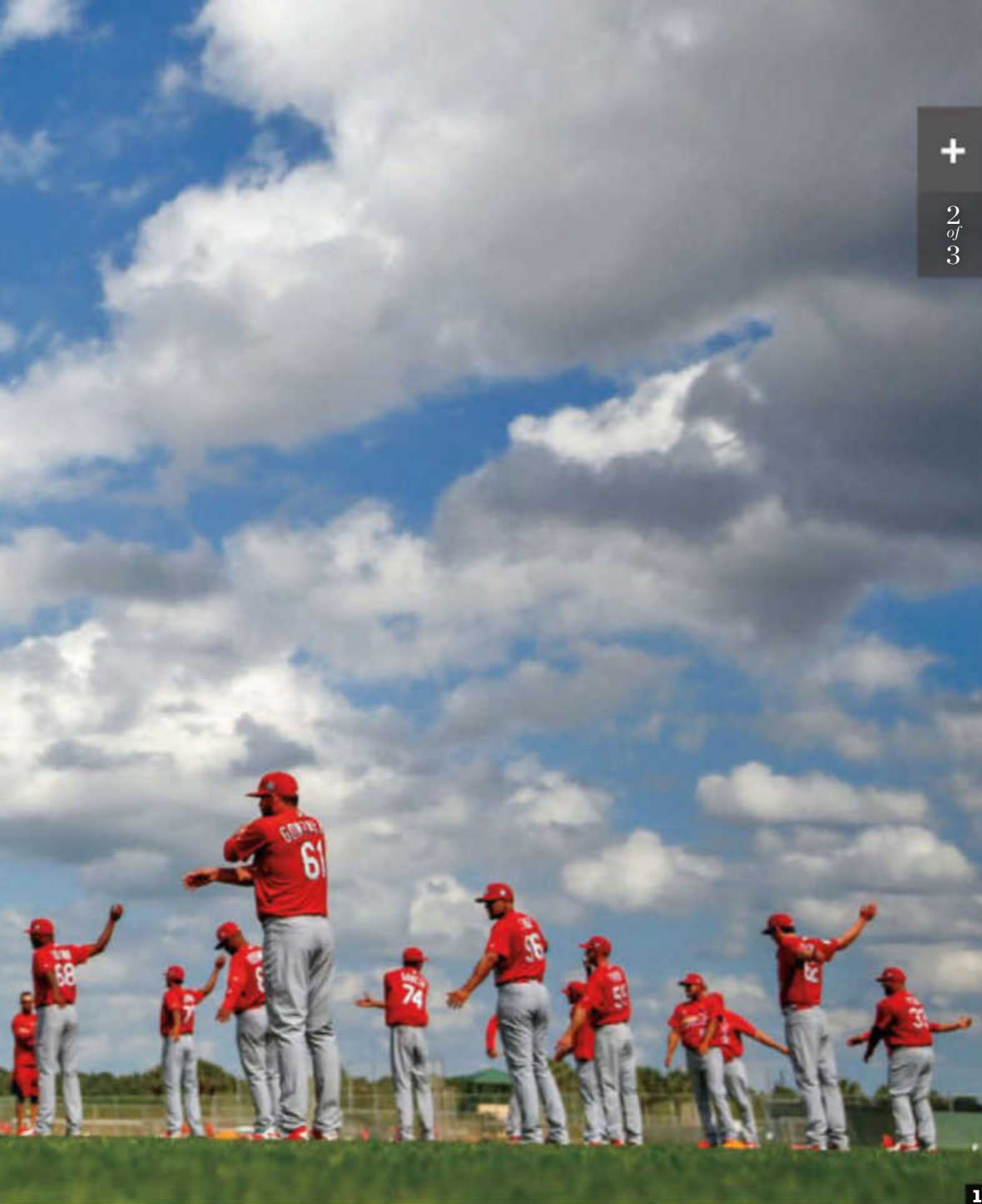
PHOTOGRAPH BY
PATRICK SEMANSKY
AP

4. New Marlins manager Don Mattingly got to know catcher Jeff Mathis in Jupiter.

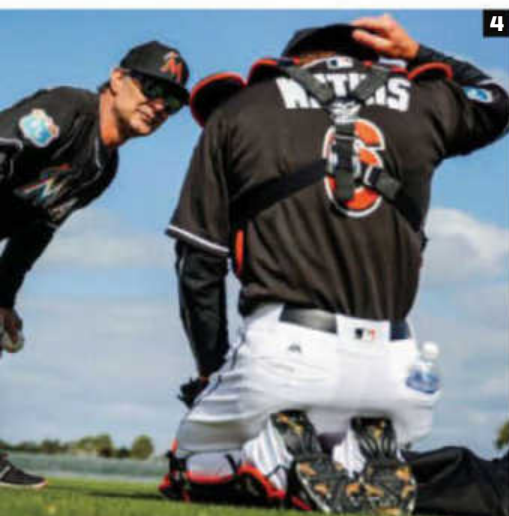
PHOTOGRAPH BY
JEFF ROBERSON
AP

5. Red Sox pitchers' celebrations were in mid-season form in Fort Myers, Fla.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
PATRICK SEMANSKY
AP



1



4



5





+

33

**Leading
Off**

Audience With The King

■ Players' families always get great seats, but even a luxury box can't compare with a patch of bullpen dirt in spring training. When Mariners ace Felix Hernandez took the mound in Peoria, Ariz., his brother, Moises, and Felix's seven-year-old son, Jeremy, were there to offer support. Or advice. Or maybe they just wanted to admire the view.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CHARLIE RIEDEL
AP

SUPERIOR SHIELDING

Gillette's new **Fusion ProShield** is the ultimate in shielding from irritation. And as all athletes know, shielding on the field is just as important.



SHIELDING IN SPORTS comes in many forms. Offensive linemen set up a protective barrier around the quarterback, hockey goalies defend a goal and baseball catchers try their best to block a runner during a bang-bang play at home plate. Of course, all of these players are shielding themselves while accomplishing these tasks, thanks to the myriad protective gear they sport each time they take the field.

It wasn't always this way—for decades, football players took the field with leather helmets, while hockey players bombed down the ice with no head protection at all. Early attempts at shielding were bulky and ineffective, until technological innovations and new materials helped manufacturers successfully marry shielding to performance.

Safety is one of the top concerns in every sport, and that includes pursuits like basketball, soccer and mixed martial arts, wherein players don't normally wear any kind of protective headgear but are just as susceptible to head injuries. In the absence of helmets, one effective innovation is right at the tip of your tongue.

More than 15 years ago, Bobbie Quinn watched her son take a hit during a youth hockey game that left him stretched out on the ice for what felt like hours. "It's really a traumatic experience," says Quinn. "I remember seeing something hanging out of his helmet, and it was his mouthguard. I still carry it around to this day."



PHOTO BY MIKE ROSSI

A former college athlete herself, Quinn was so motivated by her son's injury that she launched her own sports equipment company: Gladiator Custom Mouthguards.

Quinn sought to create a product that would successfully shield athletes from maxillofacial injuries and brain trauma; a product that would improve on the ineffective, bulky and painfully uncool mouthguards that spent more time shoved in lockers or buried at the bottom of gym bags than in the mouths of athletes they are meant to protect.

Gladiator Custom Mouthguards are as thin and streamlined as possible while still remaining highly protective. Moreover, they can be customized with



images, making them the modern equivalent of a knight rocking a coat of arms on his impenetrable shield.

One specific client and full convert to the cult of Gladiator took that customization to the extreme.

Basketball superstar LeBron James' athletic trainer, Mike Mancias, did the research and sought out the most protective and comfortable mouthguard for his star athlete. When James walked out of the locker room to play a few days before Halloween 2010, fans noticed something a little different about his appearance. James has always been described as a "monster" on the court, but that night he was a vampire—thanks to the 3D Fangs jutting out of his custom Gladiator mouthguard. 🦋

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INBOX

FOR FEB. 15-22, 2016



The Broncos' defense was dominant (*Von Trapped*), but let's keep Denver's success in perspective. In three playoff games the 1985 Bears allowed a total of 10 points.

Art Luttrell, Kokomo, Ind.



Chris Ballard's article on **Dirk Nowitzki** (*Happy Trails*) was an outstanding appreciation of a marvelous, longtime talent. But Ballard may have actually underplayed Nowitzki's achievement in 2011. He's one of only two players since '04 to lead his team to a championship without the support of another All-Star.

James M. Baker, Rocklin, Calif.

After Gary Smith retired, I thought the days when an SI writer captivated me with a subject that I had absolutely zero interest in were over. Fortunately, Michael McKnight and his story on Kent Cox and his bull, Bushwacker (*The Bull Whisperer*), proved me wrong.

Rick Berkey, Comstock Park, Mich.

By recommending fines instead of postseason bans as punishment to schools that violate NCAA rules, Louisville coach **Rick Pitino** has lost all perspective (*SCORECARD*). There is no fine that rich-getting-richer programs could not cover. The penalties should impact what matters most: ability to succeed on the court.

Kerry Walsh, Clinton, Ind.



COVER

My dad saved his first SI in 1967, when our hometown Packers won Super Bowl I, and he kept the next year's edition when Green Bay won again. He waited for the Super Bowl issue each year, adding it to his collection on the wall in his home office. As his health started to fail—he died in 2005—I took over the tradition, which I plan to continue well into my golden years. When the issue on **Super Bowl 50** arrived in my mailbox, I was reminded of great times with my father, along with many years of enjoying SI.

Dave Curtis
Brookfield, Wis.



POINT AFTER

I loved the column by **DeMarcus Ware**. I just wish, as a Dallas fan, that he had been able to give that pregame speech when he was a Cowboy.

Mark Cowart
Lexington, S.C.

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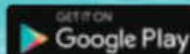
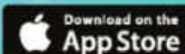
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Net Return

→ BY CHRISTIAN STONE



RICK REILLY is back in these pages, and we are thrilled. It has been more than 400 issues since he wrote the Dec. 3, 2007, *LIFE OF REILLY*, the back-page space that defined the writer and, to a large extent, SI for more than a decade. From 1996 through '07, Reilly wrote all but a small handful of our back-page columns; in seven of those years he was named National Sportswriter of the Year.

I arrived at SPORTS ILLUSTRATED in the spring of 1992. Then, Reilly was as celebrated for his longform chops as he later would be for his back-page excellence. It was tear-it-out-of-the-magazine-tape-it-to-the-wall-and-nerdily-recite-it-back-to-your-coworkers good. His stories mixed urgency, humor, pathos and tragedy, often in the same paragraph. I had my favorites. We all did.

On an angry, well-traveled slugger Jack Clark, July 22, 1991:

This is the house that Jack Built. This is the 6,000 square feet of games and toys and affection that Jack Clark made for his four kids, not at all like the house he grew up in, not at all like the silent one his own father made. In this house in Danville, Calif., he is so much more like his mother, soft and flowing like whipped cream. Out there, playing baseball, he is so much like his father. Swings angry. Talks angry. Leaves angry. Next city.

On the living hell of being a first-year, or “knob,” at the Citadel, Sept. 14, 1992:

You ask permission to eat, leave, pass, cough, sneeze and scratch your



nose. You serve everybody at mess and hope you can stuff in a forkful before mealtime has elapsed. You polish your shoes and your brass until midnight and then your French and chemistry until two, and you hope the guy who blows reveille dies in his sleep.

O.K., enough. Here's how this week's cover story happened.

IN THE summer of 1985, SI reporter Jill Lieber told Reilly, then a 27-year-old reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, to submit his clips to SI assistant managing editor Larry Keith. “I read the clips in one sitting and immediately recognized that this was someone we should hire,” recalls Keith. A brief negotiation followed in which the *Times* counteroffered, among other things, to make Reilly the successor to legendary columnist Jim Murray. Reilly came to SI, and so began a 23-year run before he left for ESPN, where he spent the last eight years.

The summer of 2014 marked the 60th anniversary of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, and senior editor Ted Keith was charged with identifying the 60 best stories in the franchise's history. Ted used his interviews

“Hey, Rick,” an SI editor asked recently, “by any chance, would you ever consider writing for SI again?”



Reilly (above) got to know Curry (top) through the charity that brought the star to Africa in '13.

with 21 current and former writers as an opportunity to broaden the conversation with such questions as, “Hey, Rick, by any chance, would you ever consider writing for SI again?”

More than three decades after Larry Keith helped bring Rick Reilly to SI, Ted, the second of his four children, brought him back.

WE HAVE yet to define a specific arrangement with Reilly, but we settled on a story pretty easily. Like the rest of the one-third of this planet that isn't covered by water, Reilly had become entranced by the Most Joyous Show on Earth, the Golden State Warriors, who are no longer a team so much as a movement. From their 53–5 record to the crowds they attract on the road to the trio of stars leading them, the Warriors recall the 1997–98 Bulls, with whom Reilly had traveled during the final months of the Jordan dynasty (May 11, 1998).

At the center of this movement, of course, is the kinetic magic of Steph Curry. Reilly's regard for Curry extends deeper than hoops. In summer 2013, Curry traveled to Africa as part of a delegation from Nothing But Nets, a nonprofit birthed in these pages 10 years ago, when Reilly wrote a column asking readers to donate money to fight malaria. It has since raised tens of millions and vital awareness of one of the leading causes of children's death in Africa.

Curry donates three nets for every three-pointer he sinks, the gift that keeps giving. Last Saturday, Curry dropped a little more ridiculous on an increasingly ridiculous season when, on the same night he tied an NBA record with 12 three-pointers in a game, he set the season mark for threes . . . with 23 games to go.

“It's not going to last, of course, this team, this moment, this perfect bite of the basketball sandwich. . . .”

So begins Reilly's story on page 30. □

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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD

Hack Attack

When there's a problem on an athlete's or a coach's social media account, there's only one thing to do: Blame someone else

BY L. JON WERTHEIM

FOR GOING ON

a solid decade now, the New York Knicks have made a habit of finding creative ways to embarrass the franchise. New depths were plumbed on Feb. 21, when the Twitter account of Kurt Rambis, the team's interim coach, issued a "like" of pornographic content from the account @ilike2touch.

But wait: Team officials tell us that this wasn't Rambis's doing; he had been hacked. "Kurt did not like those items on his Twitter page," a Knicks spokesman said, "and we worked with Twitter to make sure the situation did not happen again."

If that sounds familiar, it's with good reason. There's more hacking of athletes' social media accounts than hacking of DeAndre Jordan at the

end of a close game. In 2014, Bleacher Report listed 10 ATHLETES WHO TOTALLY HAD THEIR TWITTER HACKED. It must have been a selective list, because just two years before that, the same website had offered a slide show of 20 ATHLETES WHO GOT "HACKED" ON TWITTER.

From then-Wizards forward Andray Blatche challenging a fan to a fight in February 2011; to Metta World Peace, most unpeacefully, complaining about Phil Jackson in May 2010; to Ray Allen, who in December 2009—well, Google that one when you're not at work—none of these regrettable tweets were executed by the actual athletes. They were all, we're to believe, the handiwork of hackers.

And it's not limited

to the NBA. When then-Jets wide receiver Santonio Holmes invited a fan to commit suicide in April 2010? Hack. When MMA fighter Tito Ortiz posted a naked photo of himself in June 2011? Hack.

Nor is it limited to Twitter. Last year Jets cornerback Darrelle Revis, an ex-Patriot, lashed out at a New England fan over Instagram. "Wait did you physically go out there & play? Like did you actually play one down, lol no. So your best is to shut the f**k up, be a spectator, & watch me do something you wish you could do," he wrote. Or didn't write. Within a few hours of the post he noted, over Twitter, "My IG got hacked. No big deal!!!" In January, Lakers coach Byron Scott appeared to have challenged a fan to a

fight, Blatche that he, too, had been a victim of digital sleight of hand. "There was someone that got my password to respond back to a fan as if they were me. My social media is only for positive and uplifting things."

These frequent security breaches are causes for concern, but they provoke a host of questions. If Internet menaces were really intent on hacking the social media account of a sports figure, it's curious they would target Rambis, who had fewer than 45,000 followers at the time of the incident.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOSEPH D'ARROW



embarrassment. You'd think that, just once, hackers would use their tech savvy for good. It's curious that no athlete has claimed to have been hacked when the tweet was about organ donation or supporting cancer research. And what do we make of Larry Nance Jr., who as a freshman at Wyoming in May 2012 tweeted unfavorably about Kobe Bryant, and then, last June, got drafted by the Lakers? This would seem like an obvious hack, but, no, Nance admitted that it was his tweet and took responsibility.

"My account was hacked" has become a modern version of the-dog-ate-my-homework. If so, shame on the athletes. Taking accountability for miscues—no matter how regrettable—forms one of the organizing principles of sports. Attributing a mistake to hacking is the digital equivalent of blaming your equipment or selling out a teammate.

But let's save some outrage, too, for the p.r. operatives who traffic in this shabby alibi, who play the fans for fools, who—instead of providing social media training—provide cover. There's a word for this kind of feckless enabler: a hack. □

(His account has since been deactivated.) The mind strains to envision hackers saying among themselves, "You know who might use 12345 as a password? Kurt Rambis!"

Besides, wouldn't a hacker hell-bent on humiliating Rambis be more prone to issue a tweet saying something like, "Please remove my interim tag"? Simply "liking" a pornographic tweet? That seems like an awfully subtle way for a hacker to roll.

It's also odd that this army of sports hackers always seems to seek

GO FIGURE



8 AND 12

The number of home losses and consecutive Big 12 regular-season titles, respectively, since the start of the 2004-05 season for Kansas, which beat Texas Tech 67-58 last Saturday in Lawrence to ensure the Jayhawks at least a share of the title. Only UCLA (13 from 1966-67 to '78-79) has won more league titles in a row than Kansas, which is 192-8 at home over the last 12 seasons.

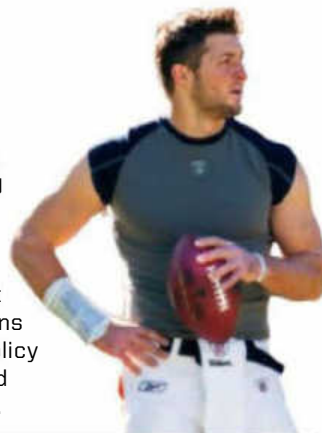
\$400 MILLION



Amount donated to Stanford by Nike founder Phil Knight, an Oregon alum, matching John Paulson's donation to Harvard as the single biggest gift by a person to one university.

5TH

Ranking of Tim Tebow in a recent poll asking Americans to name their favorite NFL quarterback. Tebow, who received support from 7% of the 410 fans surveyed by Public Policy Polling, has not played in the NFL since 2013.



\$11,000

Amount a German tourist was fined last week after being convicted of killing an endangered nene goose on Mauna Kea Golf Course in Waimea, Hawaii, on Feb. 6. Uwe Dettmar, 74, says he ran the bird over with a golf cart because his wife is afraid of geese.



IndyCar's New Faces in the Races



AFTER FOUR MONTHS of idling, IndyCar goes green for a new season on March 13, in St. Petersburg, Fla. Joining the grid on the 1.8-mile street course will be five young, well-traveled rookies eager to make their marks in America's premier open-wheel series. A quick take on a fast bunch. —Andrew Lawrence



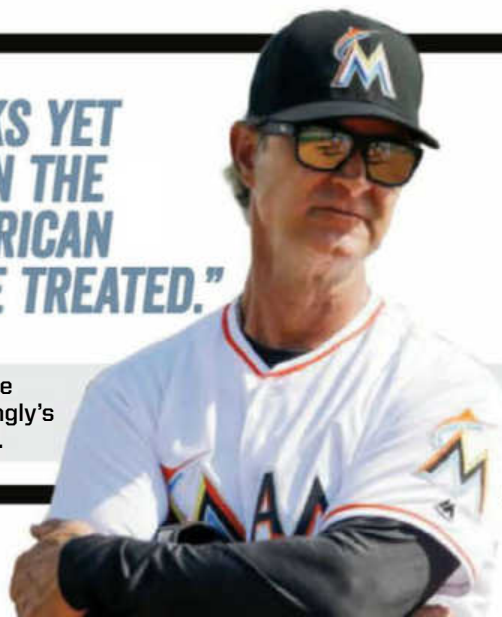
NAME	MATTHEW BRABHAM	MAX CHILTON	CONOR DALY	SPENCER PIGOT	ALEXANDER ROSSI
AGE	22	24	24	22	24
COUNTRY	U.S.	U.K.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.
TEAM	KVSH Racing	Chip Ganassi Racing	Dale Coyne Racing	RLL Racing	Andretti Autosport
EXPERIENCE	17 Indy Lights starts, two more in Formula E	35 F1 starts	Six IndyCar starts, three in relief in '15	'15 Indy Lights champion (six wins, 10 podiums)	Five F1 starts
CURB APPEAL	Australian granddad Jack won three F1 crowns, the last for his own team	Set an F1 record in '13 by becoming the first rookie to finish every start	Irish father, Derek, was an F1 pilot	Pulls for Man U, plays in a Circle City indoor soccer league	Technically America's top driver by virtue of being the only native to hold an F1 permit
ROOKIE OF THE YEAR ODDS	4 to 1: Chevy power should make the USF2000 series champion in '12 a consistent threat on road courses.	2 to 1: Ganassi is a fast company, with powerful Chevys and Scott Dixon, who won a fourth series championship in '15.	Even: An improved Honda aero package should make him quicker at Indy (where he DNF'd with mechanical issues) and elsewhere.	8 to 1: Racing a partial schedule, but a great Indy (where teammate Graham Rahal took fifth in '15) would be a major boost.	5 to 2: Road course-savvy, he'll have owner Michael Andretti (another F1 vet) to get him up to speed on oval racing.

THEY SAID IT

"THE ENTIRE EPISODE MARKS YET ANOTHER DARK CHAPTER IN THE WAY THE MUSTACHED AMERICAN COMMUNITY CAN OFTEN BE TREATED."

Adam Paul Causgrove

President and chairman of the American Mustache Institute, reacting to Marlins manager Don Mattingly's vow to enforce the team's no-facial-hair mandate.



ANOTHER SEASON ANOTHER CHANCE TO MAKE HISTORY



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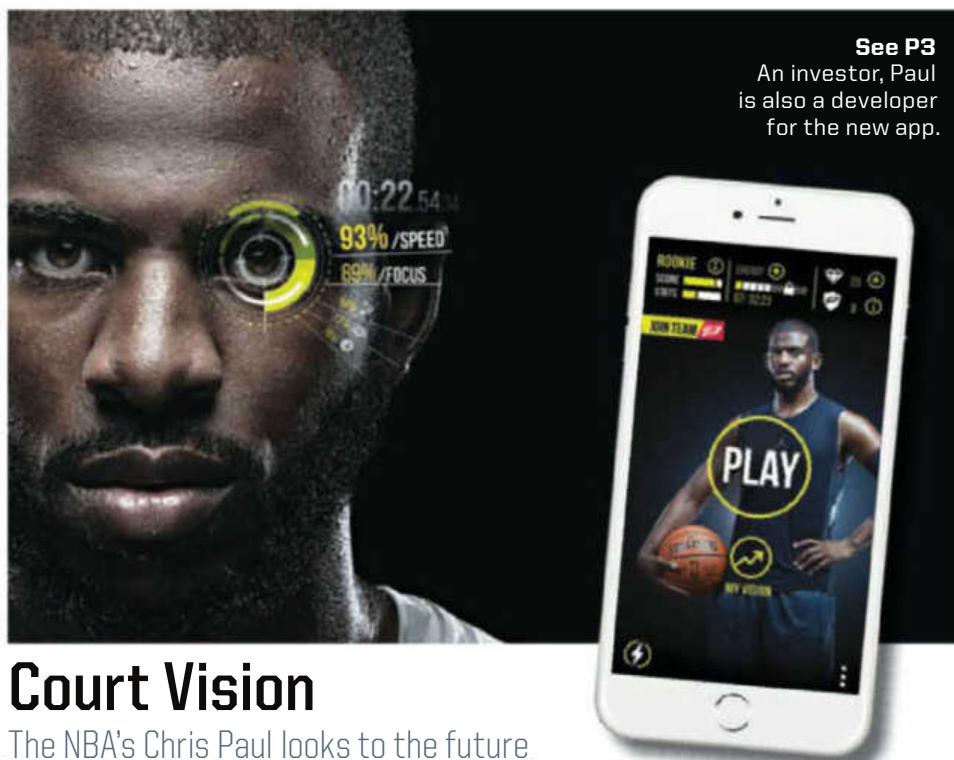
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**See P3**

An investor, Paul is also a developer for the new app.

Court Vision

The NBA's Chris Paul looks to the future

NEXT TIME YOU'RE sitting next to someone who is playing games on a phone, take a close look. It might be Clippers point guard Chris Paul working out.

Over the last year Paul has been helping a company called InnoVision develop a free app called *Game Vision* by Chris Paul. It looks like many other mobile games: Gray dots fall from the top of the screen, and when the user taps on dots with specific markings, those dots turn into fireballs that smash bricks at the bottom. But hidden behind the simple action are algorithms that exercise the 50% of a person's brain involved in vision. "The area of contrast sensitivity in your brain—and visual acuity to a lesser extent—

is actually pliable," says Derek Cunningham, a sports vision expert who studied Texas Rangers players for InnoVision over a period of 60 days.

But optometrists and ophthalmologists usually test the visual acuity of the eye and not the contrast sensitivity of the brain. "Your eye is nothing more than a data capture. You don't see with your eye at all; you see with your brain," says Cunningham, "and that's where we have an opportunity to really refine what you see." The gray dots in the *Game Vision* app are actually composed of alternating fuzzy black and white lines designed to stimulate parts of the visual cortex. Research done on 23 college-age

participants using a previous InnoVision app called *GlassesOff*, published in *Scientific Reports* in 2014, showed a significant decrease in the time taken for letter recognition (from 204 to 120 milliseconds).

Seeing faster than the opposition is critical in basketball, according to Paul, who has an ownership stake in InnoVision. "My position running the point is all about how quickly I can make decisions based on how I read the defense," Paul explained in an email to SI.

Paul wasn't qualified to consult on the algorithms for *Game Vision*, but he did help with the aesthetics of the app. When it comes to vision, you want something that looks good.

—Tom Taylor

If your phone just died, don't worry. Here are some non-pixelated ways to improve your vision.



Depth Perception

Ask a friend to hold a pen at arm's length in front of you. Try to place the cap on it.



Peripheral Vision

Get a partner to hold a straw horizontally about a foot in front of your face. Focusing on the center of the straw, try to insert toothpicks into the ends.



Dynamic Visual Acuity

Write two-inch numbers on baseballs and ask someone to throw them to you. Try to read the number before the ball reaches you.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/edge

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J.J. WATT



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finishline.com/reebok

Love the Suit

LAST WEEK, 32-YEAR-OLD Rangers pitcher Cole Hamels filed a \$150,000 lawsuit against London-based Cornucopia Events, claiming that he paid the promoter nearly \$70,000 for three VIP packages for November's Victoria's Secret fashion show in New York City. He was to receive tickets to the show and an after party, a four-night hotel stay and limousine service—but, he says, he never received any tickets and was denied entry. As strange as this case (and the \$70K price tag) may seem, it fits in well among odd lawsuits filed by athletes. —Elizabeth Newman



BRYAN FORTAY VS. THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI, 1993

ASK \$10 million

CLAIM Miami's backup quarterback in 1989 and '90 said then coach Dennis Erickson promised to eventually make him the Hurricanes' starting QB. He didn't. Fortay alleged that being denied the spot prevented him from earning millions in the NFL.

VERDICT The case was settled out of court in June 1996.



JOHN DALY VS. THE FLORIDA TIMES-UNION, 2005

ASK at least \$15,000

CLAIM Daly sued for libel after former columnist Mike Freeman wrote in an op-ed piece that Daly "failed the scoundrel sniff test."

VERDICT A judge threw out the case in 2009, saying Daly had failed to prove that the statements were libelous and untrue. He was ordered to pay the newspaper \$272,000 in legal fees.



LATRELL SPREWELL VS. THE WARRIORS AND THE NBA, 1998

ASK \$30 million

CLAIM Spree wanted to recover lost wages and damages, alleging that his 68-game suspension for choking Warriors coach P.J. Carlesimo at a team practice in December 1997 was racially discriminatory and violated his right to make a living. "I wasn't choking P.J. that hard," Sprewell later told *60 Minutes*. "I mean, he could breathe."

VERDICT A federal judge dismissed the lawsuit in July 1998.



ALEX RODRIGUEZ VS. MLB, 2013

ASK not specified

CLAIM A-Rod accused the league of "tortious interference" and being in cahoots with former Biogenesis CEO Anthony Bosch as part of a witch hunt to force Rodriguez out of baseball. The suit was filed days after Rodriguez's appeal of the 211-game ban issued by MLB for steroid use.

VERDICT A-Rod's suspension was eventually cut to 162 games, and on Feb. 7, 2014, he dropped the lawsuit.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Former attorney general Eric Holder used the name Lew Alcindor for his official email address.

Gianni Infantino

The little-known Swiss insider will replace Sepp Blatter, a Swiss insider, as the head of FIFA. What could go wrong?



HOT ▲
NOT ▼



Grayson Allen

Vaulted himself to the head of the race to be the next "most hateable Dukie." It was a short trip. His second, actually.

**Daniel Chang** | Johnson City, Tenn. | Swimming

Daniel, a Science Hill High senior, set a Tennessee record in the 100-yard breaststroke at the all-class state championships [53.94 seconds]. He also defended his 200 individual medley title in 1:46.52. A 14-time junior national finalist, Daniel was named Tennessee's outstanding male swimmer of the year. He will compete at Harvard.

**Macy Causey** | Yorktown, Va. | Motor Sports

Macy, a freshman at York High, won NASCAR's Young Racer Award in Daytona after a 2015 late-model stock car racing season that included four top 10 finishes and a fourth place at Langley Speedway, where she earned the track's rookie of the year title. Macy's grandmother Diane Teel was the first woman to win a NASCAR-sanctioned race.

**Nick Coe** | Asheboro, N.C. | Wrestling, Football

Nick, a senior at Asheboro High, defended his 285-pound title with a pin 96 seconds into the final of the Class 3A championships. He will compete for his third straight National High School Coaches Association heavyweight title in April. A defensive end who signed to play at Auburn, Nick had 178 tackles and a school-record 32½ sacks in three seasons.



TRIBUTE

Andy Bathgate
(1932-2016)

■ **Andy Bathgate**, the iconic Rangers right wing and NHL Hall of Famer who received cover billing as a HOCKEY HERO in the Jan. 12, 1959, issue of SI (above) before going on to score a career-high 40 goals and win the Hart Trophy as the league's most valuable player that season, died last Friday of complications from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's in Brampton, Ont. He was 83. Bathgate, who played for the Rangers from 1952 to '64, once held the franchise record for goals, with 272, and was named to the All-NHL squad four times. After being traded, he helped the Maple Leafs win a Stanley Cup in '64 and amassed 349 goals and 624 assists in his 17-year NHL career. Painfully modest in his '59 cover-story interview, Bathgate told SI, "I've got a lot to learn before I can call myself a really good hockey player." —A.F.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK

**Jasmine Nwajei** | Rockaway Park, N.Y. | Basketball

Nwajei, a 5' 8" junior guard at Wagner College, scored 40 points, including a game-winning layup with 1.7 seconds left, to spark a 64-63 victory over Central Connecticut. Nwajei led all Division I players in scoring through Sunday, with 28.7 points per game. She also holds the school career scoring record, with 2,039 points.

**Dylan Gambrell** | Bonney Lake, Wash. | Hockey

Gambrell, a freshman forward at Denver, keyed a pair of 4-1 victories over Colorado College in a three-day stretch: He had a goal and two assists in the opening win, followed by a goal and an assist in the first collegiate hockey game played at Coors Field. Gambrell led the Pioneers with 39 points [13 goals, 26 assists] through Sunday.

**Sophia Rogers and GCH Kiarry's Back in the Saddle**
Mansfield Township, N.J. | Dog Handling

Sophia, a homeschooled senior who also attends Burlington Community College, and her 6-year-old American foxhound [aka Bobby] won the Westminster Kennel Club's Junior Showmanship title in New York City. Sophia earned a \$6,000 scholarship.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces
For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter



JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: *How did you land the job in Phoenix at Grand Canyon [which was 24–5 through Sunday]?*

DAN MAJERLE: I was an assistant coach for the Suns [2008–09 to '12–13] under Alvin Gentry. They let Alvin go a month before the [2013] All-Star break. I thought I was in line for the job, but they passed over the three assistants on staff and went outside. I quickly realized maybe I wasn't in their future plans. I resigned, but then I got a call from [former Suns CEO/general manager Jerry Colangelo], who is associated with Grand Canyon. [He told me about the opening, and] I jumped at the idea.

DP: *Are you playing a Division I schedule?*

DM: Yes, a complete Division I schedule. We're in a transition period, going from Division II to Division I. We can't go to the NCAA tournament for four years [until 2018, per NCAA rules]. This year we played Louisville [a 111–63 loss on Dec. 5] and San Diego State [a 52–45 win on Dec. 18]. Last year we played Kentucky and Indiana. Next year we're playing at Duke, Arizona, Illinois and Penn State. We also have Louisville and San Diego State coming



DAN MAJERLE

THUNDER BALL

After spending 13 years with the Suns as a player and assistant coach, the 50-year-old former All-Star and Olympian is now making noise as coach of Grand Canyon University.

here to play us on campus.

DP: *When you go to recruit kids, do they or their parents know you from your Thunder Dan days?*

DM: Definitely the parents. The kids don't know a whole lot about me. I ask them to [look me up on] YouTube. A lot of these kids want to take their game to the next level. I tell them I came from a mid-major [Central Michigan], and I know what it takes to do that.

DP: *How different would it be for you to play now, with teams like the Warriors shooting so many threes?*

DM: We [the Suns] embraced the three because when we traded for Charles [Barkley], he demanded so many double teams that we were just going to spot up. We don't shoot a lot of threes at Grand Canyon. I still think it's a better game if you go inside-out.

DP: *You don't coach the three?*

DM: I do. But none of my players can beat me in a three-point contest.

DP: *Is there any truth to the story that Bulls general manager Jerry Krause loved you as a player and that bothered Michael Jordan?*

DM: Yeah, then Charles would start talking a little smack—the last thing you wanted to do to Jordan. I got the brunt of [his anger].

DP: *So Jordan took it out on you?*

DM: That's how that whole thing went. I fed Charles free drinks at my Majerle's restaurants, and that was how he treated me.

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Shaquille O'Neal discussed what motivated

him during his career-high, 61-point game against the Clippers on March 6, 2000, when he was with the Lakers. "[Kareem Abdul-Jabbar] was a Clippers assistant," O'Neal said. "Every time I touched the ball, he put his head down. I took that as a sign of disrespect."... CBS basketball analyst

Doug Gottlieb weighed



in on LSU freshman forward Ben Simmons's

struggles: "I don't think his coaching staff has done a good job. Had he gone to another program where coaches were used to dealing with profound potential superstars, he'd be in a better place."... NBC Sports



analyst **Paul Burmeister** wondered if any current

QB prospects could have gone ahead of top picks Jameis Winston and Marcus Mariota in the 2015 NFL draft. "Maybe [North Dakota State's] Carson Wentz over Mariota," Burmeister said. "That would have been a horse race."

The Case for . . . Changing The Combine

BY GREG BISHOP

SOME CALL THE NFL

scouting combine an inexact science. Well, they're half right. The combine is an imprecise, antiquated and overwrought process, but there's no science, unless watching 350-pound linemen jiggle through the 40-yard dash in spandex every February qualifies as physics.

The combine was a decent idea in 1982—as were the dot matrix printer and the CD player. But those items evolved. The 2016 combine is bigger, gaudier and broadcast on national television, but not appreciably different from the first edition. We're still measuring how much a quarterback can bench-press.

The problem with the combine is that it evaluates athletic ability, not all that well and way too broadly. "It's 100% like the SAT," says Shannon Turley, Stanford's director of football sports performance. "You're training for the test."

Since 2007, Turley has been refining a training regimen that borrows concepts from CrossFit, bodybuilding and powerlifting, but only as they apply to football. He cares less about how much weight his players lift and more about how they lift it, with perfect form. For the first few weeks after they arrive on campus, freshmen at Stanford don't lift weights at all. They focus on mobility and stability, the quality of movement.



The Cardinal play as physical a brand of football as any of their opponents, and yet in the last three seasons their starters have missed only 67 combined games due to injury. That's at least in part because Stanford trains its team to play football, not to bench-press or to win 40-yard dashes.

So Turley has some insight on how to fix the combine. He would start by eliminating the bench press. It's not, he argues, even a test of strength, not for linemen, who routinely do 25-plus repetitions. For them, it's a test of endurance. "Guys who are typically the strongest aren't the best football players anyway," Turley says.

Next, he would lose the vertical jump, because he feels there are too many ways to cheat that test. Turley would also drop the three-

cone and shuttle drills and replace them with position-specific exercises. He'd let skill position players, who need to show top-end speed, run the 40-yard dash but make it 20 yards for linemen and 30 yards for linebackers, tight ends and QBs.

Turley likes that the NFL added a functional movement screen test in recent years, because that, he says, "is a predictive, quantitative analysis of the quality of movement." It scores players as balanced, functional, overpowered, dysfunctional or injury-prone in seven movements. It predicts which players have a better chance to stay healthy. You know who had a high FMS score? Former Stanford corner Richard Sherman. You know who didn't? "Look at Jadeveon Clowney," Turley says. "What did he have? A history of injuries. What has his career been? A whole bunch of missed games."

Turley would take the FMS test one step further and measure prospects' ankle mobility, where the movement chain starts. He would monitor motion with digital markers. He is encouraged that the NFL hosted Dr. Marcus Elliott last week, the founder of P3 Peak Performance, who introduced a 3D motion analysis lab for the NBA's combine two years ago.

Longtime personnel types say that scrapping the bench press or the 40 would render obsolete decades of data that allow the comparison of players across eras. The question they have to ask themselves: Does that data predict NFL success? A 30-year-old recipe for average meatloaf still produces average meatloaf. The combine—and the evaluation of players—will always be an inexact science. But at least Turley's version would contain, you know, actual science. □

Georgia's
338-pound
Chris
Mayes led
defensive
linemen
at the
combine
with
33 reps
of 225
pounds
on the
bench
press.



 **THE DUBS**

OOOE TO JOY



THUNDERSTRUCK

Curry has already broken his own single-season record for threes, including the game-winning 32-foot pull-up in OT at OKC last Saturday.

SPENDING TIME WITH
STEPH CURRY & CO., THE
AUTHOR FOUND THAT THEY
DON'T JUST DOMINATE.
THEY ALSO DELIGHT,
ENTHRALL—AND INSPIRE

BY RICK REILLY

Photograph by
Greg Nelson
for Sports Illustrated



IT'S NOT GOING TO LAST,

of course, this team, this moment, this selfie of pure unselfishness. It's too perfect, the way these Golden State Warriors, whose crunch-time five is so small it would fit nicely in a Fiat 500, have become the biggest thing in the NBA, with a possible stop at Best Team Ever.

He's not going to last forever, either, this little man and his little ego and his giant bag of pebbled pyrotechnics. It's too sweet. How can Steph Curry sell the most jerseys and yet barely fill out the one he wears?

Nope. It's all going to go splat. Agents, age, avarice. They'll mess it up. It will never be this pure and happy again, and he knows it.

"It took me until my fourth year to be on a winning team in this league," says Curry. "So I know how great it is to win. I know the league is so fluid. One trade, one bad free-agent signing, and it's over. So there's no way I'm not gonna have fun. I never fail to savor it."

Want to savor it with him?



IT'S FEBRUARY, THE end of a shootaround at Oracle Arena, and the 6' 3" Curry, the league's leading scorer, ends it the way he loves to end it. He launches one of his cloud scrapers, the ones that seem to fall out of the catwalk and barely ruffle the net. As it falls, he turns his back and runs the other way. Who needs to look? But us? We love to look. One second later, *swish*.

ME: How do you know they're in?

CURRY: From the roar of the crowd. Hello?

Ask a stupid question.

IT'S LATE AND the Warriors are exhausted from beating the Raptors 112–109 in Toronto, using every basketball gadget they have: Curry's sky-show 44 points, forward Draymond (Money) Green's Chinese-menu game, shooting guard Klay Thompson's elegant spot-ups.

But now: passport control.

As each player goes through, the grim immigration agent



FOR HIS NEXT TRICK . . .

As Curry drives toward another MVP trophy, he aims to reprise the ring thing with Green (near right) and Thompson.

glares at him, glares at his passport, stamps it and waves him on. Except for Curry. The agent glares at Curry, glares at his passport, stamps it and says with a huge smile, “Thanks for making basketball fun again.”

IT’S NOT JUST Curry. It’s 15 guys who fit together like a cryptex and are twice as unsolvable.

It’s the 6’ 7”, 230-pound Green, who’s unafraid to guard anyone or boast anything but is terrified of cats.

It’s Aussie center Andrew Bogut, who could have peed into this team’s Cheerios when he was DNP—Coach’s Decision in the last two victories of the Finals last June. “If I’m not whining about that, then the guys at the end of the bench can’t bitch about minutes,” Bogut says. “Not gonna happen on this team.”

It’s Thompson, the unsplashy Splash Brother, who’s quiet as the tide but whose game is booming. When doubled, Curry dishes, usually to Thompson, who can burn any defender down to ash. Thompson lives to do two things: crush threes and go home to his beloved bulldog, Rocco.

“It’s the most unique set of players I’ve ever seen,” says Warriors board member and former Lakers legend Jerry West. “They all like each other! That never happens. Guys on my teams? No. We were all over the place. But these guys actually, genuinely, like each other. And it shows.”

But God help them if they ever start losing.

“It’s almost crazy when we lose a game,” Bogut says. “We feel like we lost the championship. I’ve been on teams when you lose a game, it’s over in five minutes. Here, it’s ‘F--- you, you should’ve played better!’ ”

What do you expect? They don’t get much practice at it.



IT’S AN HOUR after a game in Philadelphia and a pimply ball boy has been waiting for his moment to get to Curry, like an altar boy waiting to get a blessing from the Pope. Just as Curry is finally about to get a mouthful of food from the postgame spread, the kid makes his move.

“Steph, could I get a picture with you?” he tries.

(Even to a ball boy, he’s just Steph.)

Curry puts the fork back on the plate and says, “Sure.” Click. Afterward, the ball boy’s grin can be seen from Pittsburgh. “Oh, my god! My friends are gonna be *so* jealous! The greatest player who ever lived!”

ME: What about Michael Jordan?

BALL BOY: Oh, I don’t know about him. That was before I was born.

I ask the 27-year-old Curry if he realizes that to some young people, he’s their Jordan?



"Wow. I don't know," he says. "It's hard to remove myself from the day-to-day life to see the big picture. I mean, I notice the change in support we get with so many more fans on the road, more sales; I see more of my jerseys, more T-shirts. But Jordan? I mean, guys like Jordan, Bird, LeBron, they've accomplished so much. I have a lot more to accomplish."

ME: Could you end up being better than Jordan?

CURRY: I mean, that's a goal. I want to be the best. I do. I have a huge amount of respect for him, but I don't think it's disrespectful to say, "I want to be the best of all time."

Coming from anyone else that would be sacrilege. But the prom-faced Curry with sage eyes says it and you think, "What, the kid's not allowed to dream?"

IT'S NOT MUCH to ask, is it? The two things 15-year-old Sofia Petrafesa of Stamford, Conn., wants in the entire world? One: to meet her idol, her crush, her melting point, Steph Curry, whose pictures, Wheaties box, pillows, bobblehead, socks, hat, bracelets and magazine covers fill up her room. Two: to make her back stop hurting.

The first request her parents met. For Christmas, they gave her tickets to see Curry and the Dubs play the Knicks at Madison Square Garden.

The second? That would be much, much harder.

IT'S PAST THE All-Star break and the world is still joyously, wondrously, happily downside up. How could every NBA arena be suddenly half filled with colors the home team doesn't even sell? How could a league whose standard used to be a cyborg called the Spurs now be fronted by a bunch of happy snipers from the Bay Area who get more touches in a single possession than a \$20 bill at a street craps game? And how could these guys be called the Warriors anyway? They're about as warlike as fudge.

How? Because fun is the whole strategy. Fun is the Plan A to take over the world. Take the other day, in Minneapolis, time for yet another road practice. So why isn't the team bus pulling up to the arena?

"No practice today," coach Steve Kerr announces. "We're going bowling."

Bowling?

"Turns out Steph's ridiculously good at bowling, too," assistant coach Bruce (Q) Fraser marvels. "His balls have that PBA hook on them."

They've blown off practice to play touch football, take batting practice with the A's, and get to team dinners early, where they rent out entire restaurants and laugh for three hours while crowds press their noses to the windows. Team film meetings are not drudgery, they're diggery. Recently, for instance, Curry fell asleep on his man, who got a wide-open corner three. The film cut to three-year-old Riley Curry yawning at a press conference.

The rookie, Kevon Looney, fell asleep on the team's charter jet one night with his mouth open, and Green swatted a dead fly into it.

These guys are looser than secondhand socks. They're playing with house money. They won the title last year when positively nobody saw it coming. If this season were a Zagat review, it would have been: *These "soft" "underdogs" are a "lucky" "fluke" who had an "easy road" to the title.* So they came out and doubled down on the excellence. At times they've approached mythical. Through the first 50 games, when they had their three All-Stars—Curry, Thompson and Green—they were 48–2. That Three you *thought* was Big? Just shrunk.

"They've ruined the game of basketball for me," says former Dubs forward Tom Tolbert, a Bay Area sports-talk host. "No other team passes like this. No other team shoots like this. No other team has this much fun. You try to watch another team's game, and you're like, 'Well, this sucks. Thanks a lot.'"



IT'S TIME I mention it: The game's best player and I have a history.

In 2013, Curry gave up a week of his off-season—including his anniversary—to come to a refugee camp in Tanzania to hang 37,000 antimalaria bed nets with us for Nothing But Nets, a charity I cofounded in these pages 10 years ago with the United Nations Foundation. What's funny is that he paid for a lot of those nets. He donates three nets for every three-pointer he makes, which is like having your 14-year-old daughter donate three every time she checks her phone. Do you realize the NBA-record 288 threes he has made already this season—the last his 32-foot show-stopper to beat the Thunder in overtime last Saturday—could cover half the beds in Togo?

On that trip, I came to know a humble superstar who has as much time for a malaria-riddled mother as he does for the President; a patient soul who tries to smile while a peasant slaughters a goat in his honor; a mannered man who doesn't



POWER COUPLE

Thompson (above) has quietly lifted his scoring average, while Green has become a triple-double machine.

say a peep about having to ride gutted roads in tiny Toyotas as soldiers hold machine guns on either side of him.

This is about a guy who, at the end of all of that, says, “When are we coming back?”

IT’S GETTING AWKWARD, this interview, now that I’ve asked Thompson about his fiercest critic, a sports-talk host in L.A. who called him “an idiot” for fighting a 7-footer and said the Lakers of the 1980s would have “crushed” these Warriors. It’s Thompson’s father, Mychal, the former Lakers center.

“People don’t get it,” Klay says, squirming on his chair a little. “My dad has a very dry sense of humor. Like he said he was going to cut my allowance over that fight. People were coming up to me like, ‘Whoa. Your dad still has you on an allowance? That’s pretty smart of you.’ I mean, geez.”

ME: So he doesn’t get to you?

THOMPSON: No, he’s an idiot. He’s crazy.

ME: When’s the last time he beat you in H-O-R-S-E?

THOMPSON: I was 14.

ME: Can I interview Rocco?

THOMPSON: No. He needs his space.

IT’S BUZZING AT Madison Square Garden and Knicks forward Carmelo Anthony is trying to solve Curry and nothing’s working. Finally, Anthony tries something new. He puts his big hand on Curry’s face, the way your big brother did to keep your punches from landing.

“I didn’t know what to do,” Curry says. “I’ve never had someone put their actual hand on my head to stop me. It felt kind of claustrophobic, like I couldn’t move.”

He tried, though, and got a gash across his forehead for his trouble. “Hey, Carmelo,” Green yelled the next time down, “You need to cut your fingernails.”

“I was kinda mad about it actually,” Curry said afterward. “I was going to complain to him, in the tunnel. I was going to be like, Hey, look what you did to my face!”

But instead Anthony came up to him with his adorable eight-year-old son, Kiyan, who held a present for Curry—a woodcut bust of Curry he’d made in shop class. Imagine that, the whole family enjoys cutting Steph.

IT’S “PLAYER AVAILABILITY” IN Oklahoma City, and every reporter wants to know about the Number.

It’s not Green’s 11 triple doubles, best in the NBA. It’s not Curry’s 30.0 points a game—six points more than last year—or his shooting 68.1% from 28 feet out, which is pure sorcery.

No, the Number is 73. They hear about it 10 times a day. Are the Warriors going to go after a record 73 wins—one more than Jordan’s 1995–96 Bulls—or just focus on another title? It will take 20 victories over their final 24 games. “My greatest fear is never experiencing [winning a championship] again,” Green says to me over a cheeseburger one day. “It’s better than sex.” And the pat response from the players is: *Well, if we’re right there with a chance to get 73, why wouldn’t we try? That’s a record that will put us down in history.*

But Curry and the Screen-setters, as they sometimes call themselves, never talk about that number. The number they talk about the most is how much is in the Silly Fines kitty.

The goal of any Dub is to catch another Dub committing a Silly Fine and make him contribute between \$250 and \$500 to the kitty. To wit:

- Green chewing gum in the White House (\$500). “I didn’t know it wasn’t allowed,” he pleaded.
- Center Festus Ezeli tweeting after the Super Bowl: “Happy for Eli Manning.” He meant Peyton Manning (\$250).



• Kerr breaking only a small corner off his clipboard during a halftime rant in January. “Kind of a weak-ass break,” Green says. “At least break it in half.” Kerr: “It was defective!” (Fine to be determined.)

When the kitty gets big enough, there’s a half-court shooting contest. Winner takes all. Everybody gets a chance—equipment guys, trainers, even reporters. Except for Curry, who recuses himself. Unless everyone else misses.

IT’S FOUR DAYS before the big Curry game when an X-ray finally finds it—the large mass on Sofia’s back. It’s a tumor, Ewing Sarcoma, a bone cancer that shows up only 200 times a year in the U.S.

Right away, she has only one question for the doctor, the nurses, her parents: “Can I still go see Steph Curry? I really, really, really want to go to the game.”

Seems impossible, since she has to start chemo right away. “I’ll try to get you there,” the doctor says.

IT’S BEEN A week now since I’ve hit the road with the un-Warriors. I went on the road for a week with that 72-win Chicago team, too, but it’s like comparing grizzly bears to gummy bears.

The Bulls were an army coming to town. They weren’t there to laugh or dance or entertain you. They were there to crush your soul, grab the W and get out of town. The Warriors are a game of three-card monte. They’ll take your money, but you’ll have fun getting fleeced. Coach’s orders. It said so right there on the whiteboard, in Kerr’s handwriting, before Game 1 against the Cavaliers: LET IT FLY. . . . HAVE FUN. If that’s what he wants you to do during the NBA Finals, you can imagine what he wants you to do in Game 57 at Orlando (a 130–114 win last Thursday, in which Curry made 20 of 27 shots and scored 51 points).

The Dubs pass the ball as if it’s coated in anthrax. In the first half alone against the 76ers, they had 26 assists. Most teams don’t get that many in a game. They have a chance to become the first team since the Showtime Lakers of 1984–85 to average 30 dimes.

And the supernovas of the 72-win Bulls and the current Dubs? Nothing alike. “Michael Jordan lived a separate life from us,” says Kerr, who was a backup guard on that Bulls team. “He stayed in his own suites, had his own security people. Steph takes a regular room like everybody else, goes everywhere the rest of the guys do. Michael intimidated players just by walking on the court. Fans too. Steph walks on the floor, and people are like, ‘How old is he? 13?’”

Curry doesn’t think he’s the cosmos. In America right now, Steph Curry seems to be the only one who isn’t all that impressed with Steph Curry. Maybe that comes from his father, Dell, a 16-year NBA shooting guard who taught him that when

taking a jump shot, you want to land in the same place you started. Curry wants to be the same person at the end of all this that he was when he began. “He’s got patience for every single person who comes across his path,” says the team video coach, Nick U’Ren. “I’ve never seen him have a bad day.”

Curry’s joy seems to come from making others happy.

ME: Can you break Ray Allen’s career three-point record?

CURRY: What is it?

IT’S 10 MINUTES AFTER the Warriors have outlasted the Thunder 116–108 at Oracle, and because the Super Bowl happens across town the next day, the home locker room is slammed like a Hong Kong subway.

“You! Out!” barks Dan Martinez, Golden State’s senior director of p.r., at a sturdy, shortish man in a purple sweater. “But I have a pass,” the guy says meekly, holding it up.

“Don’t care!” Martinez says. “It’s too crowded in here. The players can’t even move! Out!”

And with that, the guy is shooed out into the hallway.

Turns out it’s Tiki Barber.

IT’S JANUARY, a home game against the Spurs, and another defender gives Curry the Look.

“They just stare at you, no words, no blinking,” Curry says. “It’s like they’re saying to you, ‘My turn. I’m gonna lock you down.’ And then they pick you up full court. That means the challenge is on. I’m like, O.K., let’s go.”

On this night, it’s 6’ 6” rookie Jonathan Simmons. Ezeli: “He kept telling Steph before the game, ‘I’m gonna lock you down, Steph! Gonna lock you down!’ So Steph goes out there, and he’s like, ‘O.K., let’s see you lock me down.’ And three straight and-one’s later, they’re pulling Simmons off the court, and Steph’s yelling, ‘Go sit down!’”

O.K., so maybe he’s not always mannered.

IT’S ANOTHER NIGHT when Green is in peak form. Not playing form. Talking form. Nobody in the league talks better—and more—than Green.

A fan sitting 20 rows up is yelling about how the Knicks are going to destroy him and how he doesn’t deserve to be an All-Star and how he’s softer than warm butter.

“What?” Green yells up to him, hand to his ear. “I can’t hear you! You got bad seats! They’re too far up!”

“Draymond could talk a bird out of flight,” Bogut says.

In Philly, the Sixers put 5’ 11” Isaiah Canaan on the often unguardable 6’ 7” Thompson, who kept torching him. Each time he did, Green would holler out, in falsetto, “I’m just too *little*!”

**THE BULLS WERE
WARRIORS ARE A**



GOLDEN YEAR

You'd be celebrating too if you locked up a playoff berth on Feb. 27—the earliest clinching date in history.

After the Warriors had Green's mom surprise him by interrupting a fake TV interview to tell him he'd made his first All-Star team, Green looked as if he was going to cry.

"I wanted to cry," he said, "but I didn't want to be the next Michael Jordan meme on Facebook, so I couldn't."

Memo to TNT: We found your next Charles Barkley.

IT'S 90 MINUTES BEFORE tip-off, and Curry comes out for his nightly follicle-raising warmup routine, which hasn't changed in four years. What has changed is that the world now treats it as Adele doing scales, Streep reading lines and Puck stirring sauces, combined.

You owe it to yourself to see it at least once. Curry begins with a dizzying display of two-basketball dribbling, then switches to crazy-high loft shots, then lefthanded bank shots, then T-shirt-gun shots from the corner, then high teardrops with both hands. He makes so many of all these you begin to think you're watching some kind of David Blaine trick. Then lefthanded hooks, then 10 threes from each spot around the arc—in practice once this year Curry made 77 straight—then 10 from the start of the half-court logo, then a few from half-court, then rainmakers over the backboard while standing out-of-bounds. All of it to the crowd's fireworks-show *ooooohs!* and *aaaahs!* and *whoooooas!*

In most cities the Steph Curry Warmup Show is now televised live when the Dubs are in town. A couple of teams have changed their doors-open time so that people can be settled in when it starts. (Memo to Warriors: When are you going to change yours?) One team actually offered courtside seats for it if fans bought a 10-game package.

But tonight is something new: The 76ers have set up Finals-type ropes to keep people off the court. "Never seen that before," says Q, Curry's feeder. They were not disappointed.

ME: What did you think of the TV cameras, the 1,000 people watching and the ropes?

CURRY: Hashtag overreaction.

IT'S TIME FOR the Warmup Show, and Sofia is there because . . . what self-respecting Stephaholic would miss it? Later on the Dubs run away from the Knicks, but in the final minutes it gets thrilling. NBA media exec Tim Frank shows up out of nowhere and wonders whether Sofia and her friends want to go down to the floor.

"Maybe you can watch Steph do interviews," he says.

Then it's, "Maybe you can see him walk out of the locker room."

And then it's, *Omigod, Steph Curry himself is looking right at you!* Not only that, he's holding a signed pair of his signature shoes.

"Are you Sofia?" Curry asks.

She squeaks a yes.

"These are for you." He hugs her and whispers into her ear, "I heard you got some bad news this week. I just want you to know it's going to be O.K. Keep fighting. You've got a great support system. Lean on them, O.K.?"

He unhugs and looks her in the eye and smiles.

Through the tears, all she can do is nod.

"Who gets diagnosed with bone cancer and then, three days later, meets their all-time hero?" Sofia's mother, Geralyn, says later. "And then that hero turns out to be soooooo nice?"

AN ARMY COMING TO TOWN. THE GAME OF THREE-CARD MONTE.



Gushed Sofia, “It was like he didn’t even know he was famous.” “I kept noticing her mom,” Curry says later. “She was breaking down too. I kept watching her to make sure she was going to be all right. But it’s cool it meant a lot to her. I’m glad I can be just a little bit of a distraction to her as she goes through this.”

When she gets home, Sofia can’t resist—she smells the shoes. “Hey! They don’t even stink!”

IT’S A TYPICAL day on Twitter, which means a bunch of women will tweet that they dreamed they were married to Curry and a bunch of men will tweet that they dreamed they *were* Curry, but then comes a tweet nobody’s seen before.

KayKay @KendraVilli: *my life goal is to have a threesome with @StephenCurry30 and @ayeshacurry*

Curry doesn’t check his mentions much, but Ayesha does, and she types back the Reply of the Year:

@ayeshacurry: *Yes maybe one day we will play a round of golf together. . .*

IT’S GETTING CERTIFIABLE out there. One family went as the Curry family for Halloween, complete with a Riley-aged toddler with a Riley-style headband, an Ayesha look-alike wife and a husband in full Warriors uniform, complete with the hanging mouth guard.

The other day, a fan emailed Ayesha a highlight video. But there was no hoops footage. They were highlights of all the stuff that Steph and Ayesha have posted about their family on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Dubsmash, etc. “I mean, whoever it was spent hours and hours putting this thing together,” Steph says. “That’s weird, right?”

Is it weirder than the 100 people who crammed up against the window at Piercing Pagoda to watch Curry’s new baby, Ryan, get her ears pierced? Or the police having to come to Emerson College in Boston to clear a path for the team to get onto the bus after practice? Or the four ominous big guys in New York City who creeped the Currys out by following them from Steak ‘n Shake back to their hotel—then only wanted autographs?

“Steph is approaching Kobe and Michael territory now,” Warriors security chief Ralph Walker says. “It’s really gotten crazy. I have a little back room that allows him to completely skip the crowd, and most of the time he doesn’t use it. He’s always out there, among the fans.”

Minneapolis, five below. “We had it worked out perfectly,” says Martinez. “We’d rigged up a side door for Steph to go out of and a side door of the hotel for him to go into. All he had to do was cross the street, go through the kitchen and up to his room.”

The Secret Service couldn’t have done it better. Curry and

Walker were halfway across the empty four-lane street when they heard, “Steph! Steph! Sign?” It was three kids, a good 50 yards away.

Now, nearly any other athlete in the world would’ve suddenly been stricken deaf. Not Curry. He looked at Walker, whose shoulders sagged, and then waved them over. Twenty more were right behind. Curry signed until his fingers couldn’t hold the Sharpies.

“Lordy,” Walker says.



IT’S HOUSTON. A dad stands up with his little boy in one hand and a big sign in the other. RALPH WALKER I’M 4 CAN MEET CURRY?

You know you’re big when your security guard is famous.

IT’S HALLWAY INTERVIEW time, and a reporter is talking to Luke Walton, who coached the Dubs to the greatest start in NBA history (24–0) and a 39–4 record until Kerr returned from chronic headaches. The NBA ruled that all the wins are Kerr’s, potentially an oh-snap situation.

“Do you think Kerr trusts you more now that you’ve gotten all this head coaching experience?” she asks.

Just then Kerr walks by.

WALTON: Hey, Steve, do you trust me more now that I’ve been a head coach?

KERR: You?

WALTON: Yeah, me.

KERR: Absolutely not.

IT’S HIGH TIME to point out the four things people hate about Curry:

1) His mouth guard doesn’t stay in his mouth. It’s gross. It flops out, it flops up. He chews it, twirls it, sucks on it, all game long. We need a guard to guard us from the mouth guard.

“I’ve given up,” says his mom, Sonya. “I’ve made my peace with it. It’s never going to change. He still bites his fingernails. He flicks his nose, from all his allergies. And the mouth guard.”

It’s the new Jordan tongue. And, like Jordan, Curry doesn’t realize when it’s in or out: “Some fan studied it. He said I shoot 2% better on free throws with it out. And I think he’s right. Because when I shoot a free throw with it in, I al-

GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

**CURRY IS NOT WIT
WEAR SUNGLASS**



PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Curry makes time for fans, especially Sofia, who got some kicks—and lots of encouragement—from their meeting.

ways go, Whoa, that's weird. It's where it's supposed to be."

2) He sleeps with the TV on. "Ayesha gets on me about that. Kinda drives her crazy."

3) "I saw him wear sunglasses indoors once," Kerr likes to point out.

4) He's a bad example. "He's hurting the game," former Golden State coach Mark Jackson said during the Warriors' Christmas Day unwrapping of the Cavaliers. "And what I mean by that is that I go into these high school gyms, I watch these kids, and the first thing they do is they run to the three-point line. You are not Steph Curry. Work on the other aspects of the game."

Curry took that a little hard. "Sure, anybody can just jack up shots at the YMCA," he says. "And, yeah, I would hate watching that kind of basketball. But that's not what I do. I work on all this stuff all the time, the floor stuff, the dribbling, the drills. So by the time I go on the floor, I've done all this stuff nobody sees."

November. Hours after dinner. The Dubs are 10-0 following a win at Minnesota, where Curry scored 46 points. It's been a long day. Team equipment manager Eric Housen comes back to the Brooklyn practice gym expecting it to be empty and instead finds Curry and his personal trainers, grinding.

"Left hand, inside out, between the legs, catch left hand, shoot with the right," Housen recalls. "They were going to be there, seemed like, all night. We were undefeated. He was playing a ton of minutes, and yet here he was, still trying to get better when, essentially, he's the best player in the league."

It's paid off. Since last year's MVP season he's gotten crazy better. His three-point shooting is better—a career-high 46.8% at week's end, including 61.1% over his last four games, when he has averaged 43.8 points.

"It's hard to imagine the Most Valuable Player," says Ezeli, "could then be the Most Improved Player."

IT'S JUST AFTER the Thunder win, and there's a rare sighting of Steve Nash in the hallway, a guy who's supposed to be a "consultant" to the Warriors but hasn't been around the team for months.

"What am I gonna do with 46-4?" he shrugs.

IT'S 10 A.M. AT the White House, and President Obama is in the East Room with the Warriors.

He mentions Curry scoring 51 points against the Wizards the night before, on just 28 shots. "Steph was clowning," the President says, "he was all jumping up and down. . . ." and he goes into Curry's signature little happy-happy joy-joy shoulder-shimmy dance.

You know you're famous when the President has you down.

But for Curry, the moment is more than funny. A year before, he met with Obama to talk about Nothing But Nets and the President's own antimalaria work. Afterward, Curry asked a staffer for a tour. "And, can you take me to the room where they do the championship team celebrations?" They took him to the East Room. "I looked in and I thought, Yes, we're coming back here."

Mission accomplished.

IT'S DAY ONE OF a nine-month course of chemo and radiation that could also include surgery. Sofia arrives at 7:30 a.m. and leaves at nine at night. In one six-hour session she looks at everything Instagram has ever posted about Curry.

She's had to leave school, stop her horse jumping and start homeschooling. She's trying not to cry. She knows harder days are coming. Much. But she's ready.

"On the harder days," she says, "I'm going to think of him and what he said to me, his words, 'Keep fighting.' I know already those are going to help me. And I'm going to. I'm going to fight."

O.K., now *that's* a warrior. □

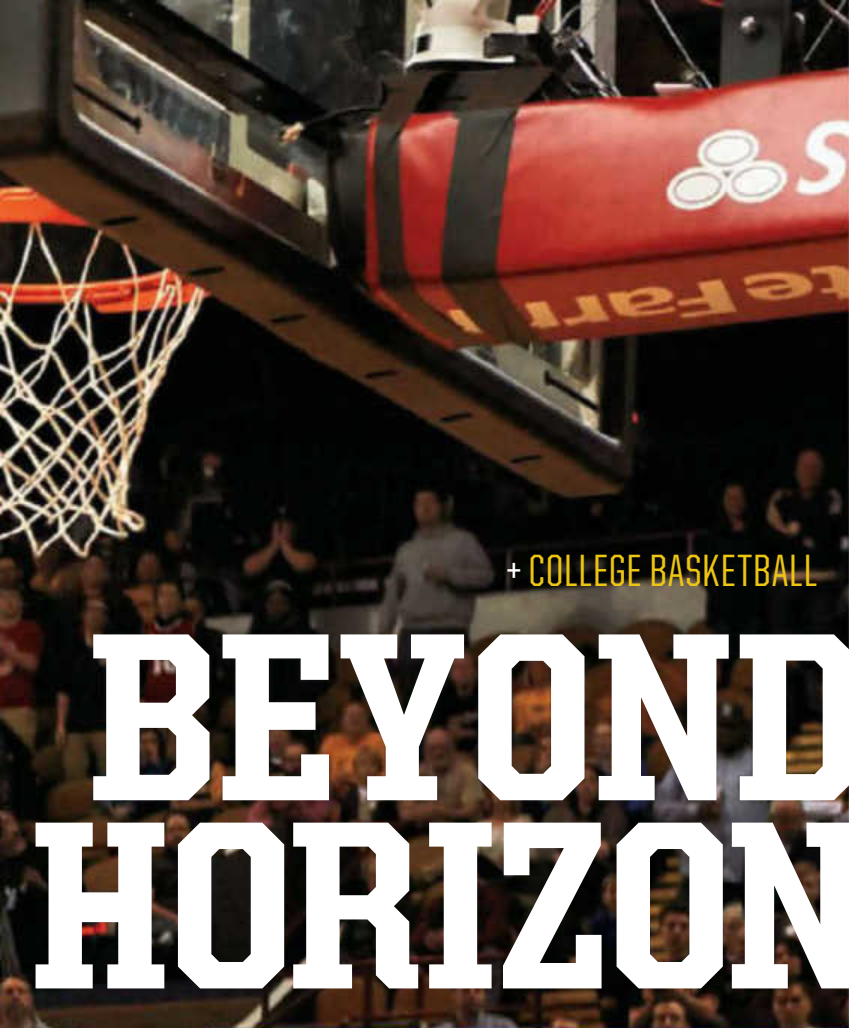
**HOUT HIS FAULTS. "I SAW HIM
ES INDOORS ONCE," SAYS KERR.**

FORM SHOOTER

Endless drills when he was younger prepared Peters to soar as Valpo's leading scorer for the past two seasons.

THE





+ COLLEGE BASKETBALL

BEYOND HORIZON

LED BY A COACH WHO KNOWS A THING OR TWO ABOUT MARCH MIRACLES, TINY VALPARAISO IS BUILT TO BECOME THIS YEAR'S MID-MAJOR PARTY CRASHER

BY ADAM DOSTER

Photographs by
Greg Nelson for Sports Illustrated



WHEN VASHIL FERNANDEZ first arrived at Valparaiso in 2011, “gangly mess” was perhaps the best description of the way he played. So much so that in ’12–’13, his first active season at the small Lutheran college in northwest Indiana, Crusaders fans cheered politely when the 6’ 10” native of Jamaica dribbled properly or successfully caught an entry feed. Fernandez’s lack of skill was hardly surprising. He’d only started playing organized basketball at 17.

The second oldest of six children, Fernandez had grown up in a three-bedroom house in rural Jamaica packed with 19 family members. He would visit his mother, Sophia Green, who worked in Kingston, on the weekends. None of his relatives had attended college or moved to the U.S., both of which he wanted to do. Since he was already about 6’ 8” at that point, he thought hoops could be his ticket out. So he transferred to Calabar High in Kingston and began playing the sport that would change his future.

While sprawled on a leather couch in Valpo’s basketball offices last month, the fifth-year senior took stock of his unexpected collegiate career. The initial adjustments—to prep school in Maryland, life in a cold climate, a Division I playbook—were

humbling. But Fernandez is now a captain, the Horizon League’s reigning defensive player of the year and Valpo’s all-time leader in blocks (264 through week’s end). Nine times this season he’s rejected five or more shots. He’ll leave the school this spring with two master’s degrees; a wife, Bridget,

whom he married last May; and a 16-month-old daughter named Maia who loves reggae and gospel dance parties. Around town they call Fernandez the Mayor. Teammates look to him for both leadership and weakside help. The transformation is striking. “I came here with an open heart and open mind,” Fernandez says.

Horizon rivals won’t be sad to see the Mayor vacate his seat. The depth and size of the Crusaders’ nine-man rotation—anchored by their center and his 7’ 7” wingspan—is rare among schools outside the power conferences. “They look like a Big Ten team,” says Belmont coach Rick Byrd, who has faced Valpo twice this season. “They look like they belong.” Guards Tevonn Walker, a 6’ 2”, 200-pound sophomore, and Keith Carter, a 6’ 1”,



180-pound senior, are thick and quick. The wings, especially 6' 7" junior Shane Hammink, are rangy and aggressive. Opponents are shooting just 40.9% on two-pointers (which ranks fourth nationally) against the Crusaders, and they grab 24.0% of their offensive rebounds (sixth). The Valpo system is not manic like West Virginia's press or constantly shifting like Louisville's D, and it's not crammed as densely as Virginia's pack-line. It is basic but ruthlessly efficient, executed with energy and consistency. "They are going to block [you] and intimidate [you] and change [your close shots], and then you're not going to get second shots," says Oakland coach Greg Kampe.

Five years after taking the helm as head coach, and 18 years after "the Shot," which is memorialized on a painting that hangs in the stadium, Bryce Drew is quietly reestablishing his alma mater as a mid-tier power. The cherubic 41-year-old has won 71.9% of his games and four regular-season conference trophies in his short tenure. His current crew (26–5, through week's end) ranks fourth nationally in adjusted defensive efficiency, and has spent stretches in 2016 at the top of Ken Pomeroy's statistical leader board.

It's a wide-open season in Division I hoops, one in which the Crusaders could, with a few fortunate bounces, make their way to the Final Four in Houston. The team's profile is similar to the 2010 Butler team that reached the national title game. Kampe has prepared for two squads with Final Four-caliber résumés this winter (Michigan State and Virginia), and his praise for the Crusaders was unequivocal: "They are every bit as good as both of those teams."

NINETY MINUTES before each tip-off 6' 9" junior forward Alec Peters hikes up the waistband of his shorts and launches into an unusual warmup routine. He begins with a series of precision dribbling exercises, baseline to timeline and back. He continues with layups off each foot, five-footers with each hand, 15-footers from each elbow and high-arching three-pointers from all over the floor. The 25 minutes of rote training is so scripted, it's as if an invisible drill sergeant is sitting courtside, barking at Peters to keep his handle low and his elbow in.

The regimen has its roots in the sleepy town of Washington, Ill. (pop. 15,000), where Peters's dad, Jeff, directed youth leagues. That job required the elder Peters to host coaching clinics for the volunteers who ran Washington's 25 teams. Alec, still in grade school, served as his demonstration dummy. The pair pored over instructional videos, surveyed high school coaches and players for inspiration and filled thick notebooks with drills. On winter weekends they'd hit the gym to show basketball beginners how the sport should be played. For young Alec it didn't feel like father-son bonding so much as yet another chore. "He'd take me to the gym, and it was like, 'Oh, here we go again—do the same thing we did yesterday,'" And yet, all that repetition helped shape Peters into a three-star recruit (according to rivals.com) who received 24 scholarship offers, including ones from Boston College, Missouri and Tennessee.

Peters is the type of talent Drew is attracting with increasing frequency,



"guys that have other options and decide to come here," the coach says. Not that Valpo didn't have to work to get Peters to commit. Kevin Brown, Peters's coach at Washington High, recalls how often Valpo assistant Roger Powell Jr. would pop in unexpectedly, driving three hours in the dark for a friendly pre-school chat. Peters (17.5 points, 8.3 rebounds this season) made an immediate impact; he has started all 99 games since coming to Valpo.

Even though Drew is best known for hitting one of the most exciting shots in the history of the tournament—a leaning, 23-foot buzzer beater in the first round that knocked out No. 4 seed Ole Miss—a workmanlike star such as Peters suits his coaching style perfectly: calm on the surface, impatient with mental mistakes and constitutionally opposed to any



DREW IS ADEPT AT TEACHING WHAT MADE HIM AN NBA PLAYER FOR SIX SEASONS: **ANGLES AND FOOTWORK**, THE ABILITY TO SLOW THE GAME DOWN AND SEE THE FLOOR.

MAYOR MCBLOCK

With help from Drew (far left) and support from teammates like Carter (above), Fernandez has become a fierce rim protector.

kind of selfishness. Peters, who hits 45.8% from three, has a rapid release and his versatility has helped him reach the top 10 nationally in offensive rating among players who use at least 20% of their team's possessions. According to Synergy Sports, only one D-I player with at least 90 spot-up opportunities (VCU's Melvin Johnson) is more efficient and only two are more efficient with at least 65 post-up opportunities. It helps that Drew uses creative schemes—post-and-pops, screening action—to free him up or isolate him on smaller defenders. Having logged 1,546 career points for the Crusaders, Peters is on track to break his coach's school record of 2,142.

Like his star player, Drew knows what it's like to live with a hoops junkie. A member of his family has manned the sideline here for 28 straight years.

His father, Homer, is Valparaiso's all-time wins leader with 371, and his brother Scott took the helm for one season before becoming Baylor's coach in 2003. Drew is adept at teaching what made him a viable NBA player for six seasons: angles and footwork, shooting form, the ability to slow the game down and see the floor. And he's also upheld the wholesome culture his family has diligently cultivated. Just as Valpo's compact campus is anchored by the Chapel of the Resurrection, an ornate mid-century church, the Drews have, in the words of one booster, "put God in the center of the program." There's a "no cussing" rule for players and staffers. Workouts, bus rides and team meetings all present opportunities to share motivating spiritual wisdom; during a recent pregame meal Powell sermonized about lost opportunities with the cadence and gravitas of a Sunday preacher. Fernandez, like others who've recently signed, finds this environment appealing. "I wanted to go somewhere," he says, "where I was still able to grow spiritually."

On the court Valpo's goals are clear: secure the Horizon League bid for the third time since 2013, win an NCAA tournament game for the first time in seven tries and join Wichita State and Gonzaga at the mid-major head table. Given the slim margin for error all one-bid conferences face, and the resource challenges Valpo is constantly managing,

nobody is under the impression that it's preordained. Their 5,100-seat gym, with its \$1 popcorn and sweater-vested fan base, is shared with several other Valpo sports; just before the doors opened for a late-January home game, members of the track team could be found hurling shot puts where the second deck of bleachers usually pulls out. Even the

T-shirt cannon jams frequently. And yet this is a rugged and experienced roster that's ready to bust brackets in the Big Dance. Call it a leap of faith from a program that takes that concept seriously.

IN VALPO'S narrow locker room words like PEACE and FRIENDSHIP are painted above skinny wooden cubbies. Drew is more comfortable "looking big picture" than when he started, and his remarks before a 97–68 demolition of Horizon rival Youngstown State reflect that maturation. "We want to get better than what we were last game," he tells his players. "We're going to keep building this thing, to get to the point that we want to get." That means a winning tradition, of course, and respect for the program among the power-conference teams.

The Crusaders lock arms in prayer before Peters leads them into the arena. When the last student has jogged out, Powell shuts the door behind them. Drew paces around the silent room, picking up discarded wrappers and stray tape. Then he tosses his notepad on the carpet and kneels. His staff joins him, slinging their arms around each other tightly. In their matching black suits, they resemble clergymen. Assistant Matt Lottich delivers the final words in a whisper, a simple demand he hopes extends through the next four quarters and then another month after:

"Bless us and bless Coach Drew's leadership, and put our guys in a position to maximize their abilities, Father God. And let us come out victorious. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen." □



21

CLAYTON
KERSHAW

3

BRYCE
HARPER

THE TRADE VALUE COLUMN

A PLAYER'S WORTH ON THE MARKET HINGES ON MORE THAN STATS AND TALENT: IT'S ALSO ABOUT AGE, CONTRACT, HEALTH—AND WHEN YOU ADD IT ALL UP, SUDDENLY THE WORLD'S BEST PITCHER ISN'T QUITE SO DESIRABLE. LET THE RANKING BEGIN . . .

BY JONAH KERI



BASEBALL IS A COPYCAT SPORT. Whenever a team surges to unexpected success, rivals go hunting for its secret sauce. With the Royals coming off a World Series victory and two straight pennants, the latest trend has some wannabe contenders hoarding relief pitching, hoping to build K.C.-like superpens.

But if demand for top relief pitchers were truly soaring, we'd see that reflected in their price tags. Instead, teams continue to mostly buy solid relievers without paying through the nose. Meanwhile, the price for starting pitchers has shot to the moon; the Cardinals tossed \$80 million at Mike Leake, the embodiment of a league-average pitcher, and no one blinked.

With that in mind, say hello to the fourth annual edition of my MLB Trade Value column. Put simply, I try to answer the age-old question that's spurred so many bar stool debates: Would you trade *this* guy for *that* guy?

We need to consider a wide range of factors along with talent and raw numbers. How old is a player? What does his medical record look like? For how many years does his team control him, and at what salaries?

To build this list, I used plenty of statistical analysis and posed all of these questions to a bunch of GMs and other talent evaluators. But this is still a subjective exercise. Would you rather have Clayton Kershaw making \$33 million a year for the next five seasons, or Chris Archer making a hair over \$20 million, total, for the next four years? The end result is a list of the 50 most valuable players currently employed by major league organizations. You can find an expanded discussion of the rankings at si.com/mlb.

1
MIKE
TROUT

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY
SI/PRÉMEDIA; JED JACOBSON
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
(KERSHAW); DENIS POROY/
GETTY IMAGES (HARPER);
ROB LEITER/MLB PHOTOS/
GETTY IMAGES (TROUT)

50 ROUGHNED ODOR
2B, RANGERS

49 TAIJUAN WALKER
SP, MARINERS

48 CARLOS CARRASCO
SP, INDIANS

47 BYRON BUXTON
OF, TWINS

So, ummm . . . mulligan? Buxton's highly-anticipated MLB debut was a bust. The player viewed by most as the best prospect in the game for the past two years batted .209/.250/.326 with 44 strikeouts and just six walks in 138 MLB plate appearances in 2015. Not every rookie hits the ground running; count Mike Trout, as well as future Hall of Famers like Tom Glavine, among those who struggled in the Show at first. Buxton is a blur on the base paths who's going to chase down a zillion gappers and gun down plenty of base runners. If his hitting and power tools eventually catch up, he'll battle guys like Trout and Correa for MVP trophies every year.

46 SALVADOR PEREZ
C, ROYALS

45 CHRISTIAN YELICH
OF, MARLINS

44 TYLER GLASNOW
SP, PIRATES

43 JULIO URIAS
SP, DODGERS

42 CARLOS RODON
SP, WHITE SOX

41 LUCAS GIOLITO
SP, NATIONALS

After legions of top prospects invaded the majors last season, this year's crop mostly lacks high-ceiling potential. But four young pitchers are the best bets to become future big league stars.

ESPN's Keith Law tabbed Glasnow as the No. 7 prospect in baseball in his midseason rankings last year,

with good reason. At 6' 8", 225 pounds, Glasnow is the archetypal tall righthander, generating lots of swings and misses—293 strikeouts in 233²/₃ innings over the past two minor league seasons, with just six homers allowed. He still walks too many, but after closing out last season with eight strong starts at Triple A, he should be pitching in Pittsburgh very soon.

At 19, Urias is the youngest pitcher in this group—and someone the Dodgers have deemed untouchable in trade talks. He also made it to Triple A by season's end, a fast and impressive pace for someone that young. The Dodgers made multiple moves to shore up their rotation this winter, and Urias and can benefit from more seasoning. But a Kershaw-Urias combo atop the rotation is a real possibility in the relatively near future.

Rodón used up his rookie eligibility last season, but he still remains White Sox property for at least six more years. He also proved he belonged in the big leagues. There were walks issues, but Rodón also fanned a batter an inning, posted one of the lowest home run rates in the league and caused hitters' faces to do wacky things after witnessing the majesty of his vicious slider.

Giolito is the best pitching prospect in the game right now: At 6' 6", 255 pounds, he generates the kind of big fastball you'd expect from a pitcher that size, with a wipeout curve to go with it. At age 21, with just eight starts above A ball, Giolito has to wait a bit before donning a Nats uniform. But if you're wondering how and why the Nationals would be willing to let a rotation anchor like Jordan Zimmermann bolt via free agency, Giolito's the answer.



40 JOSE ALTUVE
2B, ASTROS

39 A.J. POLLOCK
OF, DIAMONDBACKS

38 JAKE ARRIETA
SP, CUBS

37 STARLING MARTE
OF, PIRATES

The only player in the big leagues to have "partay" affixed to the end of his name as a term of endearment, Marte can beat you in more ways than you can count. Over the past three seasons he's been one of the NL's best and steadiest hitters (especially



43

JULIO
URIAS

41

LUCAS
GIOLITO

once you adjust for the pitcher-friendly dimensions of PNC Park); he's stolen 101 bases; and he's played very good defense in left. Marte's still something of a hacker at the plate, salvaging his on-base percentage by also being the most plunkable player in the league (with 60 hit by pitches over the last three years). If he ever learns to be more patient and wait for better pitches to drive, he could join the ranks of the NL's superelite. That would be a huge boon to the Pirates, who have Marte locked up inexpensively through 2021.

36 J.P. CRAWFORD
SS, PHILLIES

35 FELIX HERNANDEZ
SP, MARINERS

34 MARCUS STROMAN
SP, BLUE JAYS

33 KYLE SCHWARBER
OF/C, CUBS

Built like Matt Stairs, with a powerful uppercut swing, the Schwarbs launched multiple monstrous homers in his debut season. In Stairsian fashion, Schwarber also ranked near the top of the league in walk rate, working

lots of deep counts. He probably won't play more than a handful of games at catcher and is a defensive liability in leftfield too. Still, there aren't many players you can project for 30 homers and 100 walks (or close to it), and Schwarber's got a shot to join that rare cohort. Throw in the fact that he's barely 23 years old, and the Cubs have themselves a keeper.

32 ADDISON RUSSELL
SS, CUBS

31 GEORGE SPRINGER
OF, ASTROS

30 JOSE FERNANDEZ
SP, MARLINS

29 MATT HARVEY
SP, METS

28 GIANCARLO STANTON
OF, MARLINS

27 DALLAS KEUCHEL
SP, ASTROS

In 2014, Keuchel was an extreme ground ball pitcher who parlayed weak contact into solid results, despite a flaccid strikeout rate. In 2015, Keuchel's K rate surged; he fanned more than four batters for every one he walked, and that combination of lack of contact and weak contact led to his first Cy Young Award.

He's a soft tosser by modern standards, with a fastball that averages about 90 mph, and thus still leaves a few skeptics doubting his ability to sustain last season's elite performance. You could point out the 246 innings Keuchel threw between the regular season and playoffs, too, and wonder if there might be a hangover. Even if Keuchel does regress a bit, getting three years' worth of a near-elite pitcher at arbitration prices is worth a hell of a lot in today's market.

VALUE JUDGMENTS

26 BUSTER POSEY
C, GIANTS

25 MIGUEL SANO
DH, TWINS

24 JOSE ABREU
1B, WHITE SOX

23 XANDER BOGAERTS
SS, RED SOX

The fancy projection systems had the 2015 Red Sox doing big things, with ambitious outlooks for big-ticket free agents Pablo Sandoval and Hanley Ramirez and up-and-comers like Bogaerts and Mookie Betts. Sandoval and Ramirez were busts, but Bogaerts and Betts were anything but, emerging as one of the best up-the-middle duos in the American League. Bogaerts's aggressive approach—he walked just 32 times in 654 plate appearances—paid off with a .320/.355/.421 line, a fine accompaniment for his better-than-average defense in his first full big league season as an everyday shortstop. Some of those numbers could regress given his unusually high .372 batting average on balls in play. On the other hand, Bogaerts hasn't yet tapped into the power potential he showed as a teenager zooming through the minors, and at age 23 he has lots of room to improve.

22 JACOB DEGROM
SP, METS

21 CLAYTON KERSHAW
SP, DODGERS

He didn't win the Cy Young Award last year (though he had a pretty good argument for it), but Kershaw is still widely considered the best pitcher on the planet. Ah, but that contract. The Dodgers have more money than some sovereign island nations, so \$163 million (not including performance bonuses) over the next five seasons (or



2
CARLOS CORREA

23
XANDER BOGAERTS

\$98 million over the next three, if Kershaw exercises his post-2018 opt-out) poses no problem for them. But it's hard to imagine a penny-pinching team like the Rays spending that kind of money, let alone giving up three or four great young players in a trade for the privilege of spending it.

20 SONNY GRAY
SP, A'S

19 GERRIT COLE
SP, PIRATES

18 COREY KLUBER
SP, INDIANS

17 NOAH SYNDERGAARD
SP, METS

16 FRANCISCO LINDOR
SS, INDIANS

In his dazzling rookie season, Lindor staked his claim as arguably the second-best defensive shortstop in the game (behind Andrelton Simmons). Lindor showed such exceptional range, such soft hands and such a strong throwing arm that he had a viable case for a Gold Glove Award despite playing just 99 games. But what if he's an All-Star-caliber hitter, too? That's what Lindor was in 2015, batting a cool .313/.353/.482, showing surprising power with 12 homers and 22 doubles in 390 at bats, and swiping 12 bases in 14 tries. Those numbers bear watching: Nearly 35% of the balls Lindor put into play fell for hits, an unusually high figure given that he ranked nowhere near



16
FRANCISCO LINDOR

the league leaders in line-drive rate or hard-hit rate. And Lindor's minor league track record points to a competent but hardly dominant offensive player. Then again, top players sometimes make a big jump as they mature; Lindor is just 22, and his speed could help his bat play above what scouts projected for him.

15 JOSH DONALDSON
3B, BLUE JAYS

14 Mookie BETTS
CF, RED SOX

13 MADISON BUMGARNER
SP, GIANTS

The gift that keeps on giving, Bumgarner's impossibly team-

friendly contract yielded huge dividends yet again for the Giants in 2015. For the microscopically low price of \$6.75 million, Bumgarner delivered career bests in (regular-season) innings pitched, strikeout rate and walk rate, obliterating any concerns of a hangover following the 270 innings he piled up during a run to the World Series a year earlier. Counting the two club options the Giants will surely pick up (barring the sun exploding or AT&T Park getting hit by a meteor), Bumgarner will earn \$45.25 million over the next four years—and with the power of Even Year Voodoo behind him, MadBum could have five rings before his deal finally runs out.

12 CHRIS SALE
SP, WHITE SOX

11 CHRIS ARCHER
SP, RAYS

10 ANDREW MCCUTCHEN
OF, PIRATES

9 MANNY MACHADO
3B, ORIOLES

8 COREY SEAGER
SS, DODGERS

It might seem bold to rank a player this high when his entire major league track record consists of 27 games played. But the most valuable commodities in baseball are players who display exceptional skills at an early age while burning as little service time as possible. Seager might only have those 27 games, but we've got a stack of evidence to suggest he's going to be a star. In 390 minor league games he batted a robust .307/.368/.523. Yes, much of that damage came while playing in hitter-friendly ballparks, but Seager also racked up most of those numbers before hitting the

legal drinking age. Add his eye-opening .337/.425/.561 line last season, his position (shortstop), age (still just 21) and six more years of being under team control, and 29 rival teams are hiring hypnotists to infiltrate L.A. GM Andrew Friedman's office.

7 NOLAN ARENADO
3B, ROCKIES

6 ANTHONY RIZZO
1B, CUBS

5 KRIS BRYANT
3B, CUBS

4 PAUL GOLDSCHMIDT
1B, DIAMONDBACKS

3 BRYCE HARPER
OF, NATIONALS

2 CARLOS CORREA
SS, ASTROS

1 MIKE TROUT
OF, ANGELS

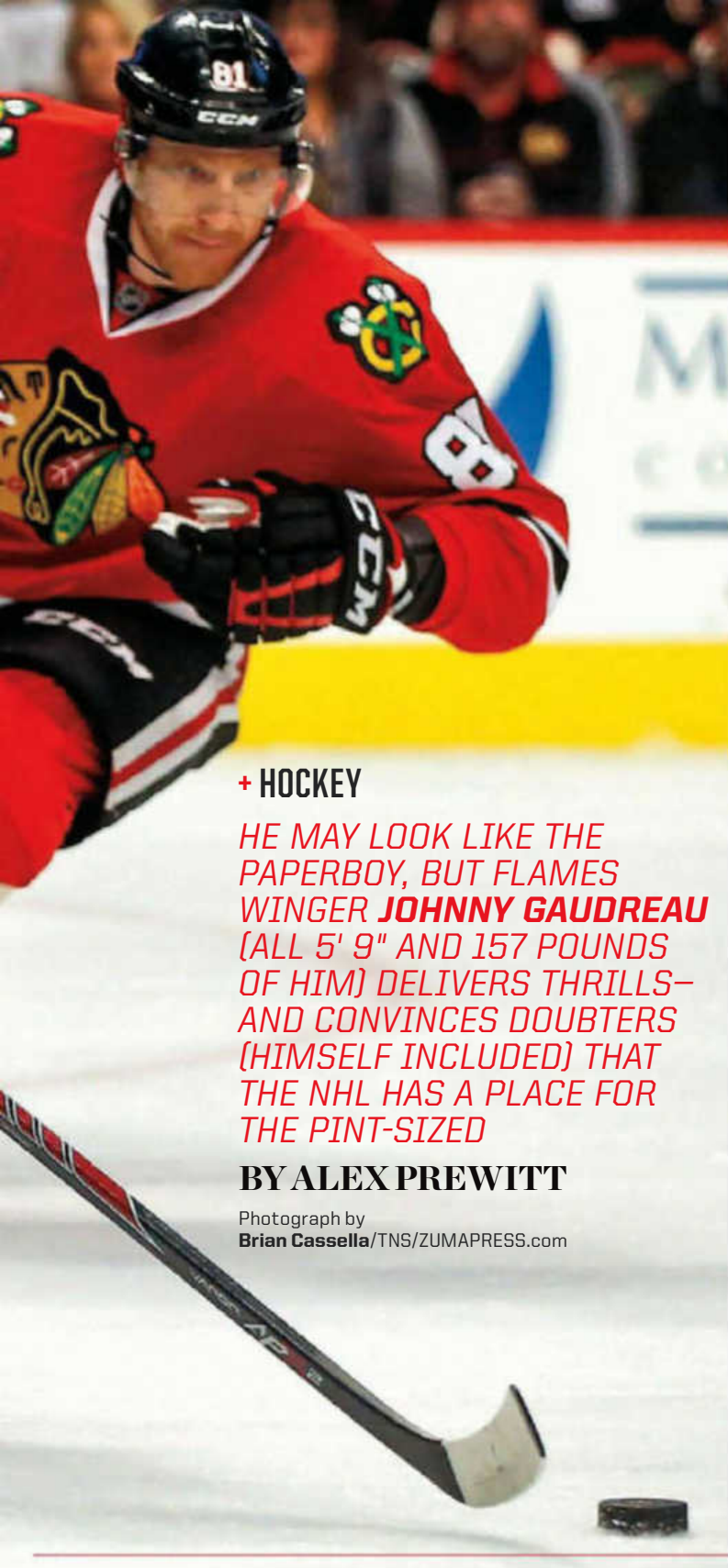
Four years of this column, four years with Trout on top. A terror from his first full season at age 20, Trout has seen his skill set evolve even as his productivity has stayed sky-high. We'll probably never again see anything close to 49 steals in a season from him (though he remains an asset on the base paths), but he's still a plus defender whose spectacular catches will occasionally make you weep with joy. What Trout mostly is now is a straight-up masher, a player whose power numbers keep escalating to the point where future 50-homer seasons can't be ruled out. He arguably could have won the last four MVP awards, he's still just 24 years old, and the Angels have him locked up for five more years. Now get him some damn help already, so we can watch the best player on the planet lay waste to the World Series, too. □



LEAN MACHINE

Knowing his small frame couldn't absorb crushing hits, Gaudreau worked tirelessly at stickhandling with his head up—one reason he has become a shifty and elusive NHL scorer.

THE **BIG**



+ HOCKEY

*HE MAY LOOK LIKE THE PAPERBOY, BUT FLAMES WINGER **JOHNNY GAUDREAU** (ALL 5' 9" AND 157 POUNDS OF HIM) DELIVERS THRILLS—AND CONVINCES DOUBTERS (HIMSELF INCLUDED) THAT THE NHL HAS A PLACE FOR THE PINT-SIZED*

BY ALEX PREWITT

Photograph by
Brian Cassella/TNS/ZUMAPRESS.com

SHORT



THE GAUDREAU family property occupies 15 acres in Oldsman Township (pop. 1,773), a sleepy section of southwestern New Jersey. The land is spacious enough to whack golf balls into the woods or shag flies in the front yard. Two soccer nets form a field near the driveway, and a swimming pool tempts guests out back. It was the perfect setup for keeping four active children occupied—particularly the second oldest, Johnny, who once complained after a sleepover, “All we did was sit there and play video games.” It was also the only house around where the kids ate steak and drank milkshakes for breakfast.

A former Division II hockey player who has run a local rink for the past quarter-century, Guy Gaudreau was realistic as he raised his two sons around the game. He worked Johnny and Matty hard on the ice, but he also taught them cold genetic truths. “I just explained that they weren’t dealt a very good hand sizewise,” the 5’ 8” Guy says, adding that if they wanted to reach the NHL, their odds might improve by fattening up.

So Guy marinated meat overnight, woke up early to light the grill, cooked massive cheese omelets and blended eight scoops of chocolate ice cream with Hershey’s chocolate syrup, Vitamin D-fortified milk and protein powder. He sought weight-gaining advice from their pediatrician and filled his sons with three daily servings of PediaSure. “I’ll put you in the garage,” Guy joked, “then tie you up by both ends and stretch you out.”

Nothing worked. Nature prevailed. Today, Boston College’s hockey roster lists Matty, a junior, at 5’ 9” and 145 pounds, easily the lightest player in Hockey East. And 5’ 9” Johnny—the Flames’ 22-year-old left wing, a former Hobey Baker Award winner at BC, 2015 Calder Trophy finalist, two-time NHL All-Star and currently, teammates attest, the most famous person in Calgary—carries the league’s lightest frame, a whopping 157 pounds.

“He looks like he could be your paperboy,” says Jane, his mother. Or, if you prefer, an “altar boy” (Flames president Brian Burke), “stick boy” (teammate T.J. Brodie), “water bug” (Anaheim coach Bruce Boudreau), “little bugger” (Calgary coach Bob Hartley) or “little brother” (too many to name). When Gaudreau reported to his first summer camp as a fourth-round draft pick in 2011, Flames staffers initially thought he was just another fan seeking autographs.

GM Brad Treliving believes Calgary’s scoring leader symbolizes something else—an evolving NHL where stricter obstruction rules let players like Gaudreau showcase their talents, regardless

59 GOALS SCORED BY KINGS WINGER MARCEL DIONNE IN 1978-79, THE SINGLE-SEASON RECORD FOR A PLAYER 5' 9" OR SHORTER.

35 NUMBER OF PLAYERS 5' 9" OR SHORTER WHO HAVE PLAYED IN THE NHL THIS SEASON.

of size. Take, for instance, a four-second span on Nov. 20, when in overtime Gaudreau fired a wrist shot from the slot, swiped the rebound from Blackhawks defenseman Brent Seabrook, faked goaltender Scott Darling onto his knees and then pulled the puck to his forehand and roofed it from inside the blue paint, all while avoiding contact. "I think he's subconsciously aware that he's a trailblazer for younger kids," Treliving says. "He's saying, 'Look at me, I've done it, and I've been told I can't.'"

Sometimes it takes even more than on-ice creativity and slick stickwork to get people to look beyond the scale. When he was 17, during preseason camp with the USHL's Dubuque (Iowa) Fighting Saints, representatives from NHL Central Scouting visited the junior team to measure draft-eligible prospects. At the time, Gaudreau's weight hovered around the low 130s, not exactly an attractive number for potential suitors.

And so it was that Johnny Gaudreau stepped onto the scale with five pucks crammed inside his jock strap. He fudged the official weigh-in (137 pounds!), hiked up his pants and carefully waddled away so nothing tumbled out. "That's all I was thinking about, getting as many extra pounds as I could," he says. "Hopefully someone would [think] I wasn't as skinny as I really was."

"HE'S *NOT THIS BIG GLADIATOR*," TRELIVING SAYS. "A LOT OF KIDS SAY, 'HE REMINDS ME OF ME.'"

HE WAS filled with doubt as he boarded the chartered plane in Philadelphia. It was mid-April 2014, the end of his junior season at Boston College. Over the previous two days the Eagles had lost in the Frozen Four semifinals, Gaudreau had won the Hobey Baker as college hockey's best player, and Calgary, which drafted him three years earlier, had signed him to an entry-level contract worth almost \$1 million per year. Now he was flying to Vancouver to make his NHL debut the next night. Flames assistant GM Craig Conroy tried chitchatting during the five-hour trip, but Gaudreau paid little attention. Not even his requested first meal in professional hockey—ham sandwich on white bread, Skittles and Mountain Dew—soothed him. "I'm thinking, Can I even compete at this level?" he says now. "I'm so small and stuff. I was too worried."

Sure, scouts praised his skill during his draft year, when he finished second in the USHL with 36 goals in 60 games and Dubuque won the Clark Cup. They marveled at his artful puck control and elusiveness in high-traffic areas, how he could bank pucks off goaltenders' masks from tight angles and read defenders' hips to know exactly how to lose them.

Still, the stigma followed him. Central Scouting's midterm rankings had listed Gaudreau second to last out of 210 North American skaters; he moved up to 193 by season's end. Six months after he was drafted, largely thanks to then head amateur scout Tod Button, who insisted Gaudreau's talent overshadowed his vitals, USA Hockey cut him from its world junior team pool, much to the chagrin of the tournament's host city—Calgary. When Flames officials protested, they received the same answer scouts had repeated for years. "Hey, great player, but too small," Treliving says. Burke was working as the Maple Leafs' GM in 2011 when an early evaluation of Gaudreau landed on his desk. He remembers the wording: "Dazzling player. Will not play Division I."



"I wasn't sure he was going to be able to play," Burke says, equally astonished and admiring. "Nobody was. He shouldn't be in this league at that height and weight. He doesn't belong here."

"Bigger players have to play themselves *off* teams," Guy used to tell his son. "Smaller players have to play onto them." So Johnny often practiced twice on summer mornings, first with Matty's club and then his own. He spent hours kicking pucks between his feet without looking down, because if his head could stay up while skating, he could sense oncoming checkers too. "As a smaller guy, there was no chance I could be taking those hits," he says. "One hit, one game, you're out of it."

Along the way he sought spots where his stature would be embraced and his ingenuity let loose. His juniors coach, Jim Montgomery, played more than 100 NHL games at 5' 10". Gaudreau chose Boston College partially because the program had a history of producing pint-sized NHL-ready players: Cam Atkinson (5' 8"), Nathan Gerbe (5' 5") and the Gionta brothers (Brian and Stephen, both 5' 7"). He signed with Lewis Gross, the agent who represented Martin St. Louis (5' 8"), a future Hall of Famer and one of Gaudreau's idols. During his Hobey Baker speech, he thanked "those who believed that someone my size could actually play and contribute at such a high level."

His big breakthrough, though, came not when the



7 PLAYERS 5' 9" OR SHORTER TO HIT THE 1,000-POINT MARK: DIONNE, STAN MIKITA, THEO FLEURY, JOE MULLEN, PAT VERBEEK, HENRI RICHARD AND ST. LOUIS.

plane landed in Vancouver and he scored his first NHL goal on his first NHL shot in Calgary's 2013–14 season finale but rather the following fall. Through five games Gaudreau had no points and mustered only one shot on goal. He missed the sixth as a healthy scratch. Flirting with a demotion to the minors, he returned to the lineup two nights later—"Most nervous I've ever been for a hockey game," he says—and banished any notion he was overmatched.

On a power play midway through the second period, Gaudreau, set up below the goal line to the right of Winnipeg's cage, took a feed as he bolted behind the net. In one smooth motion, Gaudreau dropped to his knees, opened his hips to handle the tight angle and nudged the puck inside the post. This was the nifty scorer that the Flames had hoped to see—smooth and stealthy, magic conjured in a flash. He rose up and grinned. "That was the first time I really took all my doubts away," he says. "It told me I belong here."

ON A sunny day after practice in mid-February, Gaudreau rolls into a Calgary restaurant freshly shaved, having forsaken his latest attempt at facial hair because too many friends gave him grief. Aside from a few locals eyeing him through the window, lunch passes without interruption. This is unusual. "Oh, yeah, I notice people hiding their phones behind glasses," he says.

Gaudreau has autographed both a baby's pacifier and a Loonie coin. At a pregame tailgate during the 2014–15 playoffs, when the Flames reached the second round and Gaudreau led them with nine points, at least 50 people took pictures with *his parents*. A construction worker once gave Burke his hard hat, requesting Gaudreau sign it for him. "He's become a poster boy for the city," teammate and roommate Josh Jooris says. This year, when a deliveryman dropped off packages where Jane Gaudreau works, he slipped into her office because "I just wanted to meet Johnny Hockey's mom."

There was a time when Gaudreau's representatives worried about his embrace of that Manziel-inspired nickname, which he got at BC and had trademarked in the United States and Canada last year. (The family says it licenses approval only for charitable events.) "But I think the name is where the similarities end," says Gross, noting Gaudreau enjoys a much quieter life than the controversial quarterback. Adds Treliving, "There's a shyness to him, a realness to him. He's not this big gladiator. A lot of kids say, 'Hey, he reminds me of me.'"

FLAMETHROWER

Gaudreau quickly won the hearts of Calgary's faithful—and not only because he often tosses a stick to a lucky fan.

Which is to say Gaudreau also resembles any other scatterbrained twenty-something figuring out adulthood. "He's not the most domesticated kid," Jooris says. Last year Jane wrote her son's rent checks. On separate occasions his friends, father and agent have arrived at games only to learn that Johnny forgot to leave

tickets. "I'm working on the laundry thing," he says. "When I was in juniors, I didn't know the difference between a washing machine and a dryer, let alone how to use them."

Postadolescent naiveté is only acceptable to a point, though; when Gaudreau arrived to the rink late the morning after Super Bowl Sunday last month, he and two other teammates were scratched as punishment. The next day, Guy hammered the lesson home to his embarrassed son. "They want you to be a superstar," he told Johnny. "You're going to make all this money. There's no excuse. This is part of growing up."

Indeed, the lucrative raise Gaudreau will receive this off-season as a restricted free agent—conservative estimates see him sextupling his current \$925,000 salary—will reflect how the Flames have earmarked their most marketable asset for their future. But this season has also brought new challenges; despite Gaudreau's 62 points, sixth in the league at week's end, Calgary was also 12 points out of playoff position, not that the honeymoon has ended. "Walking around the mall, you hear whispers," Jooris says. *That's Johnny Hockey. That's Johnny Gaudreau.* "I don't know if he's noticing it half the time."

But sometimes the attention is too loud to ignore, like when the Flames hosted the Rangers on Dec. 12. About one minute into overtime, while the Rangers held possession and both sides changed lines, Gaudreau hopped over the boards. He hadn't even touched the puck before a roar spread around the rink. A few fans whistled. Someone blared a horn. "A gasp of anticipation," Treliving remembers. "An electricity in the building," Hartley says. Back-checking through the neutral zone, Gaudreau was confused. "I'm looking up like, Whoa, what're they screaming about?" he said. "No one's scored."

This last detail didn't matter. The altar boy was on the ice. The congregation was rising to its feet. They're all believers now. □

FIST IMPR

BY
MICHAEL MCKNIGHT

Compared to other mammals, the great apes are an aggressive and violent group of primates, and among the great apes the case can be made that we are the most violent.

—DAVID CARRIER, University of Utah Biologist

Every time I land a punch, it's satisfying. . . . It's not just, Oh, I hurt someone. It's like an instant gratification, a bit of an accomplishment.

—HOLLY HOLM, UFC Champion, on ESPN Radio

IF the eyes are windows to the soul, then a punch to the face is a baseball crashing through the glass. Even before Holm landed 29 “significant strikes” to the head of Ronda Rousey in the stunning UFC women’s bantamweight title upset in November, there was a punching revolution under way at the top levels of MMA, with leather throwers such as Conor McGregor and Robbie Lawler slowly supplanting the army of jujitsu artists that once owned all the belts.

In noncombat sports, meanwhile, swinging one’s fist at the countenance of another—landing it near any of the seven holes in the human head—is banned in football, baseball and basketball. Soccer, too. Yet despite these prohibitions, the punch, the only offensive move allowed in boxing, remains popular among athletes outside the ring. And outside the locker room. And, as in Blake Griffin’s recent encounter with a Clippers equipment manager, both inside and outside the restaurant.

The stakes are heightened for both the untrained puncher and punchee in such instances. Broken jaws and cracked metacarpals are more common in street fights than in MMA matches, which goes a long way toward explaining why—except in that infamous outlier, hockey—throwing a George Foreman at someone’s grill



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Photograph by
Erick W. Rasco for Sports Illustrated

SESSIONS



*OVER MILLIONS OF YEARS,
**MAN HAS EVOLVED
TO THROW PUNCHES,**
TO TAKE THEM—AND TO BE
FASCINATED BY THEM. THAT'S
ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN
THEY POP UP IN PLACES THEY
AREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE. AND
THERE'S GOOD REASON WHY
WE CAN'T LOOK AWAY*

is penalized so severely in the games that forbid it. Even if many of those punishments land with less accuracy than the punches that spurred them.

A worthwhile analysis of what some fans call “extracurriculars” must meld physiology, psychology and ethics, and like athletic competition itself, that study stands to reveal as much about human nature as it does about athletes in particular. All of the different strains of intrasport pugilism are available for study on YouTube, which loops examples together, end to end, for our edification and enjoyment. There’s a helmetless Dez Bryant’s getting popped in the mouth last summer at training camp by a Rams cornerback named Imoan Claiborne. There’s Nebraska cornerback Kellen Huston laying out a jubilant Missouri fan after the Tigers upset the Huskers in 2003. After a brief ad, you are treated to J.R. Smith landing a Bruce Lee backfist to the face of Jae Crowder in last year’s NBA playoffs—a shot that not only knocked out the Celtics’ forward for a few seconds but also tore his ACL.

There have been justifiable punches over the years—such as those thrown by Syracuse football players after their opponents from Texas allegedly aimed racial slurs at black players in the 1960 Cotton Bowl—and there have been bizarre swarms of them, as when Georgetown’s basketball team accompanied Vice President Joe Biden on what was ostensibly a feel-good visit to China in 2011, only to have their exhibition game against the Bayi Rockets devolve into an interteam street fight.

Heroes as saintly as Bill Bradley, Roger Staubach and Steve Kerr have succumbed to the urge to mash someone else’s face in. (Respectively, the faces of Rick Barry, Clint Longley—who picked *two* fights with Staubach during the Cowboys’ 1976 training camp—and a certain Bulls two guard.) “I knew I had two choices,” Kerr told SI in ’97 about what he felt were Michael Jordan’s excessive shoves during a scrimmage. “Either let it go and be obedient to Michael forever, or fight and probably get my ass kicked.” The black eye Kerr sported the next day indicated that the latter had come to pass, but his pride and his rep remained intact—the underlying goal of most one-on-one rumbles.

Within these disparate scenarios, three main causes of punching stand out, each of them rooted in a perceived lack of respect felt by the puncher before he lets his fist fly. The athlete who punches is almost always seeking to uphold his honor in some way, his fury and internal chemistry blinding him to the fact that throwing hands usually accomplishes the opposite.

There is the onlooker to consider too. While researching this article, its author found himself both riveted and disgusted by the dozens of sports punches brought forth with a single keystroke. Why are we so captivated? What fascinates us about the moments just before and after a fist meets a face? Why do we humans tend to gather ’round—or at least take a quick peek—anytime a fight breaks out in our midst?

Instead of asking why we punch each other in the face, argues anthropology professor David Puts of Penn State, “the better question is, What do we get really angry about? The research tells us that threats to social status among peers is a big one. If you’re made to look bad in front of other guys or in front of a female, that’s a threat to your access to mates. It can flip a switch in us.”

University of Utah biologist David Carrier almost came to blows with another academic not long ago over something as innocent as Carrier’s belief that the foreheads of sperm whales were evolutionary adaptations intended to batter other sperm whales during mating fights. “He was getting frustrated



SEVERAL WITNESSES WO THE BLOW IS WHAT HAS ABDUL-JABBAR CALLED MELON LANDING ON CON YEARS AGO, BUT I CAN ST

and angry, waving his fist in my face,” Carrier says of his colleague. “He said, ‘I can punch you with this, but that doesn’t mean that’s why it evolved!’ That’s when I thought, Maybe *that is* why the fist evolved.”

Summarizing the seven years of research that followed, Carrier says, “Humans are the only animals capable of forming a fist. See how the fingertips fold into the center of the palm? Apes can’t do that. Their fingers are too long and their thumbs are too short.” These self-contained, transformable clubs at the ends of our arms are why, according to Carrier, humans slug each other while our evolutionary forebears likely preferred more superficial assaults such as slapping, scratching and hair-pulling.

Carrier’s conclusion is as blunt as a right from Mike Tyson: “We are face-punchers.”

1 THE DON’T-DISS-ME (OR I’M- NO-PUNK) PUNCH

Puts’s assertion that losing face in front of others is a main cause of fisticuffs

AP PHOTO



DOWN AND OUT

Washington slugged Tomjanovich on pure instinct, an impulse that would haunt both men for years; when Emery (below) punched Taylor, the results were fortunately less damaging.

ULD SAY THE SOUND OF LINGERED WITH THEM. IT A "CRACK, LIKE A CRETE. IT'S TWENTY-FOUR ILL HEAR IT."

may have been supported in the petri dish of the Jets' locker room last August when defensive end IK Enemkpali once more asked quarterback Geno Smith when Enemkpali might be reimbursed the \$600 he paid to fly Smith to Enemkpali's youth football camp in Texas one month earlier. Smith had not shown up for the camp, which had embarrassed Enemkpali in his hometown of Pflugerville—and, if we judge by the result, threatened the defensive end's social status. While Smith allegedly ducked the issue (though he has denied owing Enemkpali money), other Jets players had ribbed Enemkpali for letting the QB get one over on him. At the Jets' facility on the morning of Aug. 11, a 260-pound member of the only species that can form a fist formed one and threw it.

Smith's broken jaw had to be surgically repaired, which, aside from rearranging the Jets' QB depth chart, defied the additional findings of Carrier and his research partner,

2

THE SUCKER PUNCH

Carrier is asked to view a clip from a December basketball game in which BYU guard Nick Emery, jogging under the basket during an offensive set, planted his foot and swung his left fist—straight-elbow molly-wop style—at the face of unsuspecting Utah guard Brandon Taylor. Carrier, who rarely watches basketball, responded to the video not as an evolutionary biologist but as a man. "My first reaction is that the player who got punched was incredibly calm," he said with a chuckle. "I expected him to explode off the floor in a rage and go after the guy. Because that's the kind of punch where you expect [the punchee] to come after you with complete reckless abandon."

Emery's punch that night seems to have affected Taylor less than it has the millions of screen-gazers who have seen it. When the referees and 15,000 fans (via jumbotron) reviewed the punch, the crowd let out an outraged howl and the refs called a flagrant 2 foul and ejected Emery. Taylor played the last 1:44 of the Utes' 83–75 win, looking none the worse for wear.

In the heady days that followed, though, there were calls for Emery to be suspended for the rest of the season, kicked off the team, kicked out of school. Utah coach Larry Krystkowiak canceled next season's BYU game—halting a series that had been played 257 times over 107 years—explaining, "I am concerned about the potential for serious injury in the current atmosphere of this rivalry."

Any pretense of collegiality between the two camps dissolved when BYU athletic director Tom Holmoe threw a roundhouse via Twitter ("Canceling the [game] is RIDICULOUS") after which a BYU staffer, thinking the boss's account had been hacked, deleted the tweet. Holmoe retyped it and tweeted it again.

Emery's punch provoked this string of harsh reactions, says professor Jonathan Gottschall of Washington & Jefferson College, "because it exemplifies what I



call cowardly violence. In other words, there is the intent to do harm without putting yourself in danger.”

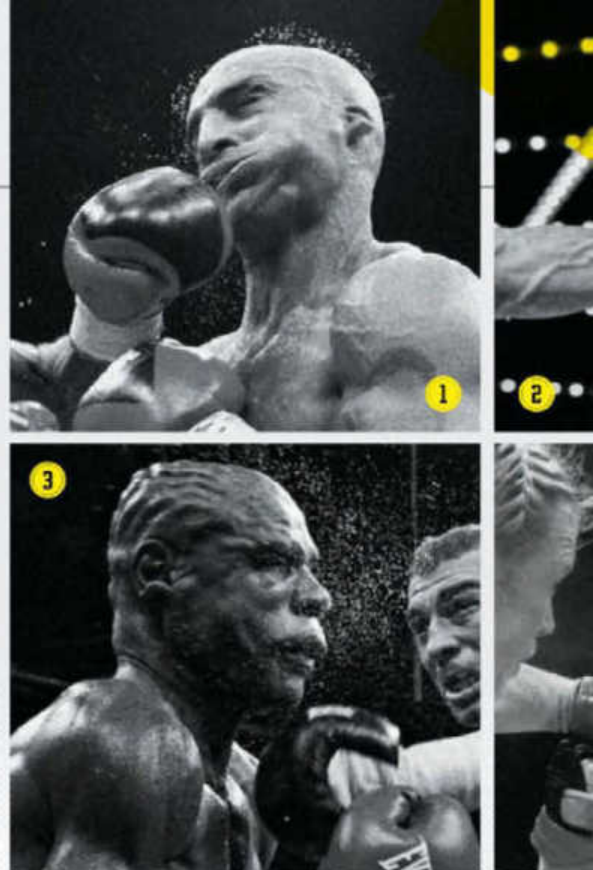
Gottschall is the author of *The Professor in the Cage*, a riveting first-person account of the three years that the 40ish, physically unimposing English teacher trained to become an MMA fighter. “A punch like that violates our codes of ethics,” says Gottschall. “We consider guys [who throw sucker punches] to be scoundrels without honor. When men compete, even when men fight, there are unspoken but very clear rules. It’s a code that runs deeper than our culture. It’s in our DNA.”

Which explains why Puts, namesake of Penn State’s Puts Lab and one of the world’s most esteemed experts in human behavior, responded to his viewing of Emery’s punch by exclaiming, “What a d---!”

3 THE DON’T-MESS-WITH-MY-TEAMMATE PUNCH

Perhaps the most infamous punch ever thrown in a non-fighting sport is the straight right by Lakers forward Kermit Washington to the face of Rockets forward Rudy Tomjanovich on Dec. 9, 1977. It was not a sucker punch but a terrible accident of time, space and circumstance that not only changed both men deeply but also added a third referee to all NBA games and dramatically increased the league’s penalties for fighting.

It happened in the third quarter of a close, otherwise unremarkable game, right after Lakers center Kareem Abdul-Jabbar took issue with a shove from Houston big man Kevin Kunnert. The 6’ 8”, 222-pound Washington, in his role as team enforcer—a role as common in the disco-era NBA as it’s ever been in the NHL—confronted Kunnert so that Abdul-Jabbar, the league’s best player, could keep his hands clean. (Abdul-Jabbar had broken his hand, and been fined \$5,000, when he socked Bucks rookie Kent Benson in the eye seven weeks earlier.)



“IT’S A CODE THAT RUNS CULTURE,” SAYS GOTTSC

SACKED OUT

After the punch, the football sack might be the most this past NFL season had 1,187 of them. Are they SI asked the men who know best.

“TELL ME, O MUSE,” *The Odyssey* begins, “of that ingenious hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy.” Almost 3,000 years later Reggie White’s sacks of a different Troy [Aikman] rule our collective imagination. Like Homer’s poem, the sack is epic. Some of the hardest- and most-hit quarterbacks recall their low points.

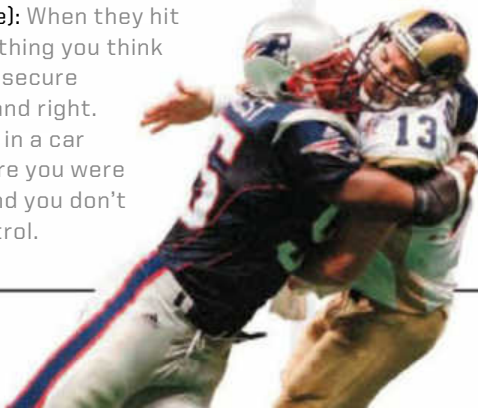
JON KITNA (63 sacks in 2006, fourth all time): It’s like waiting in line at an amusement park for this cool

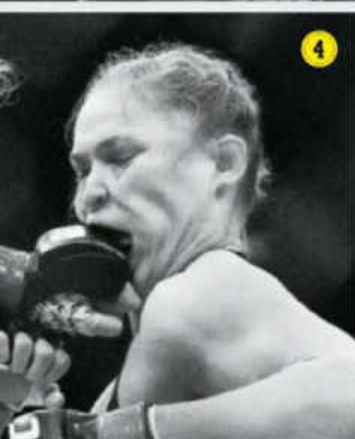
ride, and you get to the front of the line and they say, “Something went wrong,” and shut the ride down. It’s such a disappointment.

RANDALL CUNNINGHAM (484 sacks, fourth all time): When they hit you, the first thing you think is, I’ve got to secure the ball and land right. It’s like being in a car accident where you were rear-ended and you don’t have any control.

KURT WARNER (260 career sacks): Ninety-five percent of sacks, you hardly feel them. You just bounce up. But there are always those few in which you’re focused on something downfield, and all of a sudden a train hits you from the back in the ribs.

KITNA: On old-school turf, those turf burns would last a week or





FACE IT

Humans are the only animal capable of making a fist—and so men's faces have evolved to withstand a punch, as boxers and MMA fighters often demonstrate. (Women's faces, however, evolved differently.)

- 1 Dean Francis, 2007
- 2 Anthony Pietrantonio, 2011
- 3 Glen Johnson, 2011
- 4 Ronda Rousey, 2015

DEEPER THAN OUR HALL. "IT'S IN OUR DNA."

Before Washington and Kunnert could get into it, Washington sensed a red blur approaching him from behind. It was Tomjanovich, running in to make peace. But Washington didn't discern the "make peace" part in time to keep from throwing the punch that caved Tomjanovich's face in and sent him flying backward like a cartoon character.

Several witnesses inside the Forum that night would later tell author John Feinstein (for his 2002 book *The Punch*) that the sound of the blow is what has lingered with them ever since. Abdul-Jabbar called it a "crack, like a melon landing on concrete. It's twenty-four years ago, but I can still hear it." Rockets guard Calvin Murphy "cried at length," Feinstein wrote, while discussing the moment. Jerry West, the Lakers' coach at the time, called the punch "one of the reasons I got out of coaching."

Tomjanovich, then a four-time All-Star, would not play again for 10 months. When he returned, he was not quite the player he'd been before the punch, and his face, which would undergo five surgeries, looked structurally different: longer from nose to chin, with a noticeable loss of symmetry. The NBA suspended Washington for 60 days and fined him \$10,000, double Abdul-Jabbar's short-lived league record. A jury would later award Tomjanovich \$3.3 million in damages from the Lakers, a massive amount for that era and \$500,000 more than Tomjanovich had asked for. (The case was eventually settled for \$2 million.)

The punch's second-greatest impact was on Washington, who before the incident had been regarded as a gentle giant but after it spent decades trying to prove to the world that he was not what that moment implied he was. Washington did not proclaim that intent; rather, he infused it into his numerous charity missions to Africa, his public-minded business endeavors and countless community-service projects. His obsession with this penance would eventually cost the former academic All-America his career and damage his marriage, his finances and his peace of mind.

violent act in sports—and as bad as a fist in the face?

BY JACOB FELDMAN

10 days, throbbing in the middle of the night, waking you up. Other times your shoulders are sore, your hips, back, neck. Sometimes you're not over the soreness until Friday or Saturday.

ARCHIE MANNING (396 sacks, 13th all time; led league in 1971, '72 and '75): The '84 Bears got to me, I think, 11 times one day. We had a fullback, Teddy Brown, and after a sack in the middle of the second quarter he said, "We ain't got enough people."

WARNER: That playoff game in New Orleans where I got blindsided, it felt like my upper body and lower body went in completely different directions and I broke in half. I had trouble getting out of bed for 2½ weeks.

MARK BRUNELL (390 sacks, 14th all time; sacked 50 times in one season three times): The best thing you can do when you get sacked [is] to pop right back up, no matter how bad it hurts. If you lie on the ground, it fuels the fire for the defense.

DREW BLEDSOE (467 sacks, sixth all time): Some guys have an ability to take a hit

and still deliver the ball. That's very, very hard to teach, like trying not to blink when somebody is going to poke you in the eye.

BRUNELL: I did get sacked by Reggie White. That was pretty cool. The greatest player ever at that position. I didn't like it at the moment, but it's a badge of honor.

MANNING: I had a knee replacement a couple years ago, and I ran into one of my old linemen. He said, "Boy, you're really limping." I said, "Yeah, if my buddies had blocked anybody, I wouldn't be in this situation."





Like Washington, Nick Emery and IK Enemkpali each had violent incidents in their pasts before throwing the punches that overshadowed everything else in their careers. At Louisiana Tech, Enemkpali scrapped with a bouncer who was also an off-duty policeman. At Lone Peak High in Highland, Utah, Emery was ejected in the third quarter of a rare loss for clotheslining an opposing point guard and flinging him into the air by his neck. Emery's high school coach, Quincy Lewis, once called his star guard "just an ornery dude on the court."

BYU declined requests from SI to interview Emery, Cougars coach Dave Rose and Lewis, who is now one of Rose's assistants. But during an interview with a TV station when he was at Lone Peak, young Emery explained, "When I get into a game, I just flip—I'm honestly one of the meanest players. I feel bad sometimes and I'm just like, Gosh, why did I do that?"

Four possible influences—Emery's own subpar play, rivalry games, road crowds and losing—seem to have something to do with it. Before punching Utah's Taylor, Emery shot 3 for 15 and was beaten by Taylor off the dribble at least eight times. Taylor, when asked recently what Emery had yelled at him following the punch, said, "He looked down and was like, 'Stay the f--- down, b----!'"

Which only makes it more astonishing that Taylor did not rise and retaliate. A native of Los Angeles who had seen fisticuffs on basketball courts before, Taylor, a psychology major, says, "What am I gonna do? Get thrown out of the game? Teach that lesson to my teammates? I'm a senior. He didn't hurt me. It didn't get under my skin."

Too often we judge backing down from a fight to be unmanly. But Gottschall reminds us that when Alexander Hamilton was challenged to a duel by Aaron Burr in 1804, Hamilton couldn't bear to be seen as cowardly, so he showed up at the arranged place and time, and was killed. As one of Hamilton's friends wrote after his death, "If we were truly brave, we should not accept a challenge, but we are all cowards."

BYU may well let months pass before allowing Emery to explain his side of things beyond the prepared statement issued after the incident. ("I got caught up in the intensity of the game and let my emotions get the best of me. . . .") That's how long BYU athletics waited in the case of Kai Nacua, the safety whose punching rampage 15 months ago provided perfect examples of both dishonorable violence and noble comeuppance.

BYU had just lost a *testy* double-overtime heartbreaker to Memphis in the 2014 Miami Beach Bowl when a donnybrook broke out near midfield and Nacua, a 6' 2", 213-pound sophomore who had started and played the whole game, sprinted into the fracas and threw a hook at an unsuspecting Memphis player. Unfortunately for Nacua, a Memphis defensive end named Isadore Outing, who hadn't touched anyone (yet), witnessed Nacua's sucker punch from two steps away, then calmly closed those two steps and, looking Nacua squarely in the eye, threw what might be the closest approximation of the Kermit Washington punch that sports had seen in nearly 40 years.

The result was not nearly as catastrophic, fortunately.

AS ONE OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON WROTE, "IF WE WERE TRULY BRAVE, WE SHOULD NOT ACCEPT A CHALLENGE, BUT WE ARE ALL COWARDS."

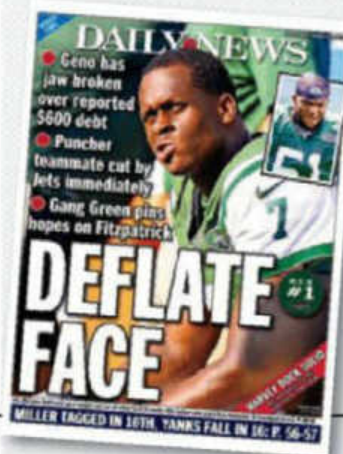
Outing's fist ripped a gash in Nacua's cheek that made him look like he'd been hit by a ripe tomato, but Nacua stood right back up and, possibly fueled by vengeance or a perceived threat to his social standing, took a running start and threw another sucker punch at the turned head of a Tigers tight end. This is the one you may have seen in Vine form (6 million loops and counting): number 12 in a BYU jersey leaping, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* style, toward his victim and challenging the guy's neck muscles to keep his head attached. When Nacua landed and danced away from the scrum, he didn't look angry. He looked puzzled.

Nine months later he explained to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, "It was the worst feeling ever. . . . Immediately I was accepting [of the punishment, a one-game suspension]. I was just humbled. Everyone saw what happened. There is no trying to fight it, because it was all over TV."

Nacua served his one-game suspension and performed 100 hours of community service. He returned to the field against Boise State in the Cougars' second game last fall, snagging a school-record three interceptions in a 35–24 win.

JET DEBT

When Enemkpali clocked Smith over money allegedly owed, it sent the latter to the injured reserve list while the former landed in Buffalo.



As shallow as our understanding of punches is, our failure to consistently police their invasion of sports is even more, well, striking. Nacua's and Emery's one-game sitdowns seem light punishment compared with, for instance, the seasonlong suspension of Oregon back LeGarrette Blount after he socked Boise State's Byron Hout in the jaw in September 2009. Blount's punch was provoked, although not justified, by Hout's verbal taunt a moment before. (Blount had promised an "ass whuppin'" of Boise State but instead had rushed for minus-five yards in a humbling 19–8 loss. Hout ran up to him

MILTON'S FRIENDS

LY BRAVE, WE

ALLENGE, BUT WE

after the game, slapped him on the shoulder pad and said, “How ’bout that ass whuppin’?”—at which point Blount fired a jab that crumpled Hout to the blue turf.)

Hout got up after Blount’s punch—no harm done—but Blount still lost most of his senior year to suspension. Enemkpali and Smith, on the other hand, seem to have paid for their punch evenly: Smith suffered his physical injury and subsequent demotion, and Enemkpali is now considered, in some quarters, a locker-room cancer and sucker puncher. The Jets declined a request to interview Smith, whose jaw injury made Ryan Fitzpatrick the Jets’ starting quarterback, but we can safely assume that the avalanche of public reaction that the young quarterback endured long afterward—about Enemkpali’s punch lifting the Jets to their surprising winning season, about Enemkpali being the team’s unofficial 2015 MVP—inflicted some nonphysical pain. In September, Smith told *Newsday*, “Emotionally, it’s tough . . . but I’ve been getting good support in the locker room with the guys.” Smith joked about the weight he’d lost due to his injury. “Sometimes when I walk past a mirror, I’m like, ‘Wow, I look skinny today!’” he said.

The rest of us might benefit from a different sort of look in the mirror, to determine the reasons behind our craving for the addictive pulse-jump that accompanies fistic violence, our eagerness to judge how people handle themselves when push comes to punch. Like prehistoric spectators before us, we are hooked on watching one man emerge dominant over another.

“Part of what draws us to it,” says Gottschall, “is that it’s so tragic. One guy has his arm up [in triumph] while the other guy has had something taken away from him in the most public manner possible.”

Some social scientists, Gottschall writes, argue that “our attraction to violent spectacles was good for us. . . . I will argue for a more pessimistic position: We are drawn to violent entertainment simply because we like it. We are not nearly as good or as civilized as we think.” □



Music of The Sphere

→ BY STEVE RUSHIN

BASKETBALL IS jazz, a collaborative and improvisational American art form exported to the world and returned to us as Kristaps Porzingis, the Latvian rookie sensation for the Knicks whose name—if you sing it right—sounds like “April in Paris,” the staple of Count Basie and Duke Ellington that goes: “Kristaps Porzingis, chestnuts in blossom. . . .”

In America our Counts and Dukes come from basketball or jazz, not Downton Abbey. Mel Counts played center for the New Orleans Jazz and just missed posting up Pistons center Walter Dukes. We look to basketball or “The Lady Is a Tramp” for our Barons and Earls, including former center Earl Barron. It’s a short trip on a straight line from jazz to basketball—from Pearl Bailey to Thurl Bailey, from Fats Waller to Fats Waller, from Nat (King) Cole to Nat (Sweetwater) Clifton. Take the A Train—the Ellington classic or Artis Gilmore. They’ll both bring you to the same place.

Meadowlark Lemon could be jazzman or baller. Wayman Tisdale was both. “Basketball” wasn’t Thelonious Monk’s middle name, but close enough. (It was “Sphere.”) Which métier you prefer—Oscar Peterson’s or Oscar Robertson’s—rests largely on how you answer these questions: Was Charlie Parker or Larry Legend the supreme Bird of the 20th century? Has Steph Curry or George Gershwin provided the greater Rhapsody in Blue? Which was the more profound version of *Giant Steps*—Coltrane’s album, or Kareem’s memoir of the same name?

The glorious names in basketball and jazz confirm their status as preeminent modes of self-expression. How else to explain that Bo Ellis and Boo Ellis were both drawn to the NBA, as were Campy Russell and Cazzie Russell, and Rolando Blackman and Renaldo Balkman? Devin Durrant was no Kevin Durant, but who is? Goran and Zoran Dragić are brothers, but Marcus Cousin and DeMarcus Cousins are not even cousins. God Shammgod was not the father of Fred Christ. But they all arrived at the same profession. And don’t get us started on the various Markos and Darkos and Zarkos.

Basketball names can be many things—a two-word shopping list (O.J. Mayo) or a two-word description of George

It’s a short trip from jazz to basketball, from Pearl Bailey to Thurl Bailey. The A Train—the Ellington classic or former Bulls center Artis Gilmore—will both bring you to the same place.



What’s the best music-hoops crossover?

Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@SteveRushin**

Harrison (Fab Melo). Cornelius Cash could have been a 19th-century railroad baron, Brook Steppe two geological formations. Thabo Sefolosha belongs in the Bible, the First Letter of (Chris) Paul to the Sefoloshas.

And while Bulls guard E’Twaun Moore didn’t inherit the sundry endorsements of his predecessor, Michael Jordan, he deserves a national snack commercial nonetheless: “Lay’s potato chips—you always want to E’Twaun Moore.”

Basketball and jazz share percussive qualities, and a common vernacular of keys, sets, bass lines and baselines. Pro basketball has its roots in ballrooms: the Harlem Rens played in the Renaissance Ballroom, the Philadelphia Sphas in the ballroom of the Broadwood Hotel. The reverse is true too: think of all the high school dances on gym floors, streamers strung from basketball hoops.

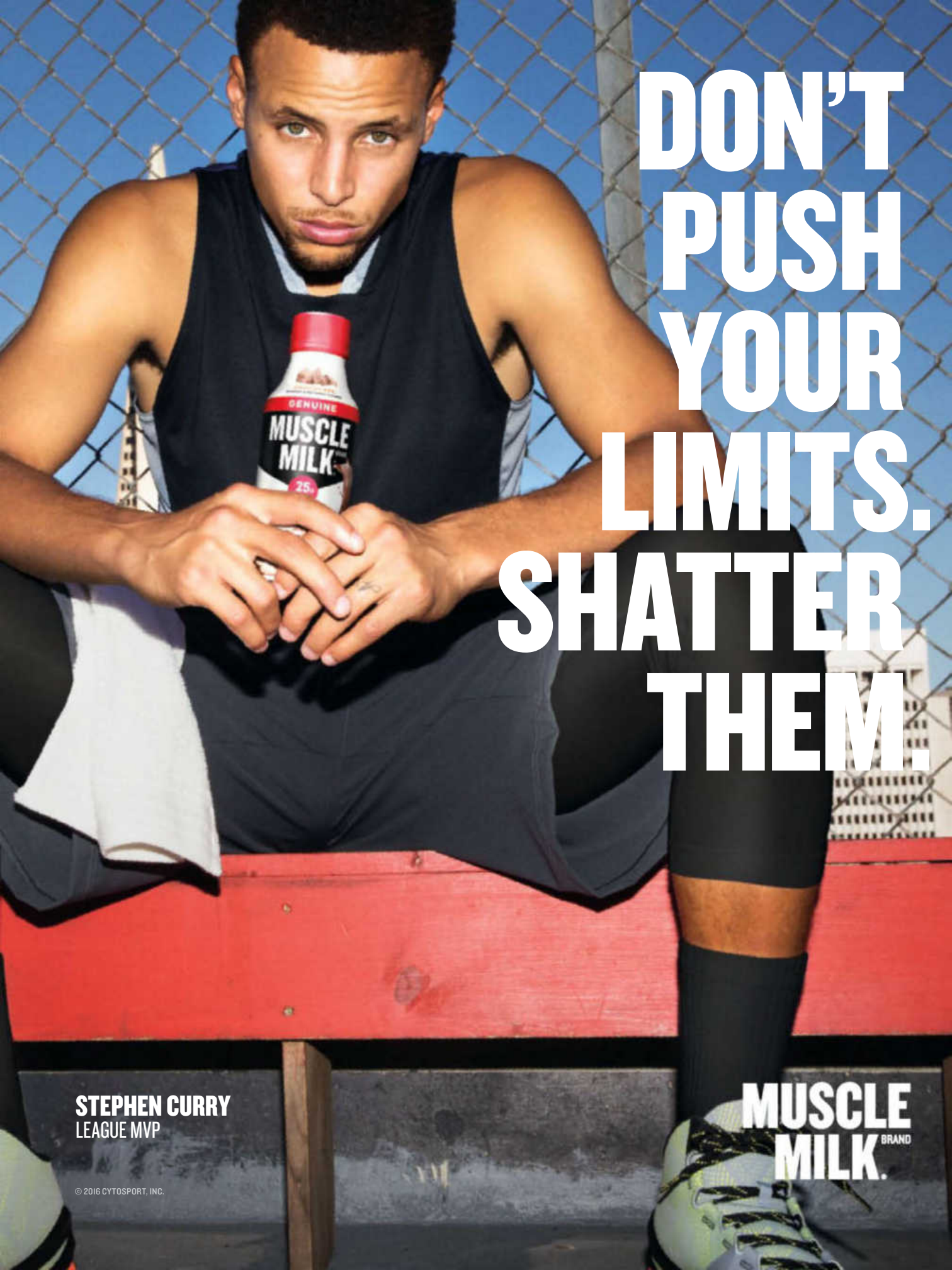
Jazz isn’t basketball’s only musical analogue. The game has inspired countless band names in various genres, among them Mookie Blaylock (which became Pearl Jam), Luscious Jackson and Tenacious D. Leonard Skinner was the basketball coach at Stillwell Junior High as well as the gym teacher at Robert E. Lee High in Jacksonville before gaining greater fame as the namesake of Lynyrd Skynyrd.

I know, it’s only pick ‘n’ rolls (but I like it). And who wouldn’t. The music or the names or the game itself transports us to some interstellar space. It’s probably a combination of all these things—a little bit of music, a lot of physical brilliance and a cool name. It’s one part Mingus, two parts Porzingis.

The result, in basketball or jazz, is lights going up on a polished stage, and the site of artists going to work: the muted trumpet that is Wah Wah Jones, the drum kick pedal that goes Boumtje-Boumtje, and over there, seated in a corner, Phil Jackson on triangle. □



SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-922X) is published weekly, with an extra issue in February and skipped issues in January, February, April, July and August, by Time Inc. Principal Office: 225 Liberty Street, New York, NY 10281. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada addresses through the UPM process: GST #R66381621R001. U.S. Subscriptions: \$65 for one year, SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. Your bank may provide updates to the card information we have on file. You may opt out of this service at any time. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. See DMN 707/412.5. NON-POSTAL and MILITARY FACILITIES: send address corrections to Post Office Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662-2120. MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2016 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: For 24/7 service, please use our website: www.SI.com/customerservice You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662-2120.

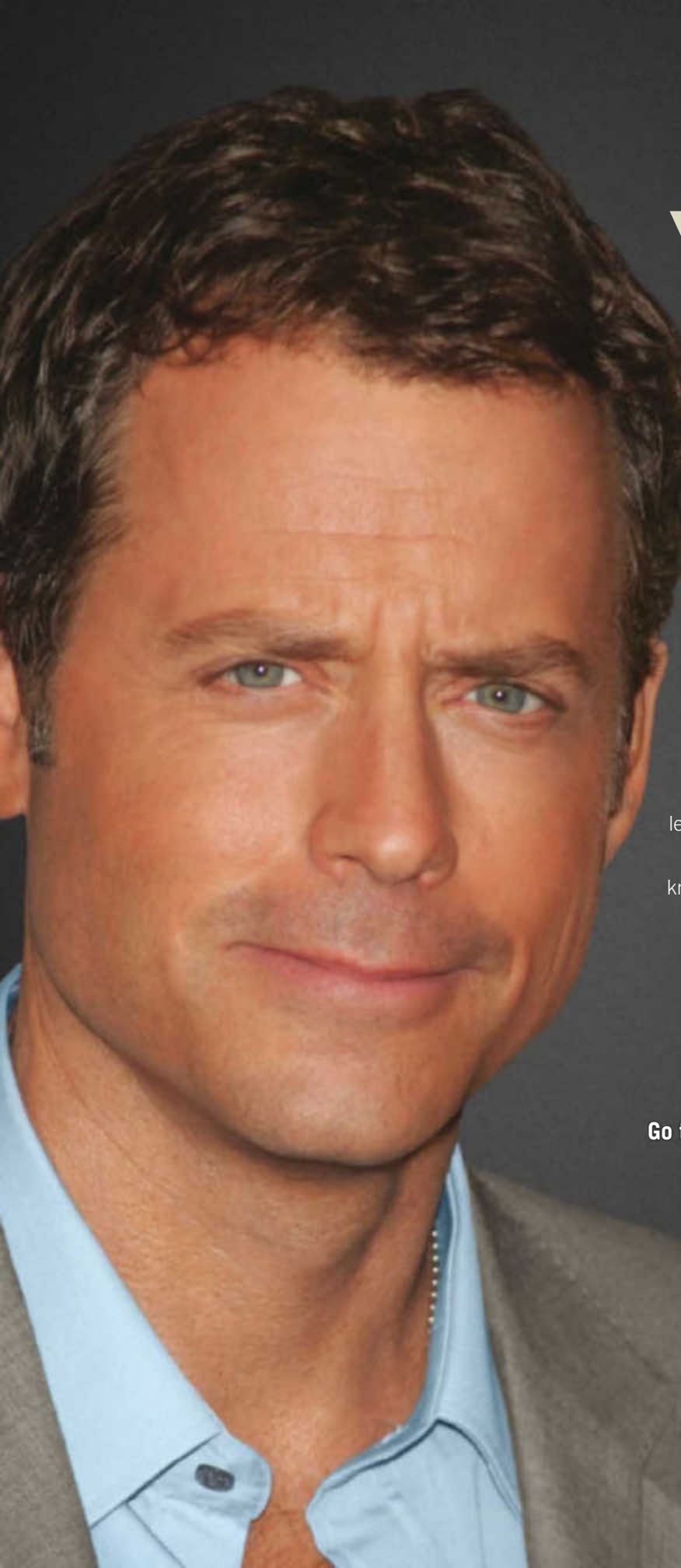


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